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Evaluating career coaching for employed adults

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Abstract

This article examines the practical challenges of evaluating the impact of career development interventions with employed adults. It does this through a case example of a one-to-one career coaching programme offered to all individuals working in primary healthcare in England. The paper describes the coaching intervention and its context, followed by the development of an evaluation logic model and the choice and design of data collection tools. Summary results are presented. Reflections on the evaluation approach, methods and tools are shared with the aim of encouraging others to evaluate career interventions, especially with employed adults, in other contexts.

Key words: Career coaching, career development, evaluation, employed adults, healthcare, England

Introduction

This paper describes the context and nature of a career coaching intervention for workers in primary healthcare and how its evaluation was approached. The focus of this paper is on methods, so the samples covered by the analysis and the evaluation results are given here in summary form. The paper ends with some reflections and suggestions for others seeking to evaluate career interventions, especially with employed adults. Further details of samples, analysis and results are reported in Carter and Hirsh (2024).

Background to the intervention and the evaluation

In 2021, a national body supporting publicly funded healthcare initiated a career coaching programme open to all individuals delivering primary care services in England. This intervention covered many occupations including those working in general practice (community-based medical care) such as doctors, nurses, other health professionals, managers, and receptionists. Other work settings in scope included pharmacies, dental practices and optometry. From October 2021 to March 2024, over 2,000 primary care workers received coaching support through this programme.

The career coaching was delivered by a pool of experienced coaches contracted through one coaching provider organisation. Some were general or leadership coaches and others specialised in career coaching. Some coaches had worked in the health sector, often as health professionals or managers. There was no fixed agenda for the coaching. Coaches were expected to support individuals to address their own career issues, take more control over their careers and widen their understanding of career opportunities.

Individuals self-nominated and registered themselves for the programme and the intervention was administered through an online platform. Individuals could access up to four sessions with their coach, normally up to 45 minutes long, via video or phone at times agreed with the coach. Coaches could signpost an individual to further support if needed and coachees were emailed with follow up information and support once their coaching sessions had finished. The coaching experience for each individual started and ended on their own timeframe.

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) was commissioned before the programme launch to design and conduct an evaluation. The sponsoring body, as the client for the evaluation, specified focusing on the impacts of career coaching rather than feedback on the coaching process (e.g. administration, relationship with coaches etc.). Impact was to include how the intervention affected individuals but also its potential effects on staffing issues of concern to organisations in the sector.

The project evolved over time, and a growing interest in longer-term impact extended the timeframe of the evaluation from one year to two years. Evaluation data was collected from January 2022 to January 2024. Data was analysed at various times with final reporting in May 2024.

Key features of the context

When this initiative started, primary healthcare in England was under huge workload pressure from both new patient needs and backlogs following the disruptions to service delivery during the early phases of the Covid pandemic in 2020-21. Many staff continued to be exceptionally busy during the whole period of the intervention and its evaluation.

A driver for this programme was concern that stress and reduced job satisfaction might lead primary care workers to reduce their working hours or retire early: a trend already being seen for doctors. Many of these workers would have trained and worked for many years to become highly skilled in their chosen professions and would be difficult and expensive to replace.

The sponsoring organisation hoped that career coaching, along with other existing forms of employee support, might have a positive impact by helping individuals adjust their current jobs, or find other work to suit them without leaving the sector.

Developing the evaluation approach

Establishing an appropriate evaluation methodology turned out to be more challenging than expected. Technical advice on appropriate measures for the impacts of career interventions was sought from experts in career development including NICEC fellows, commercial career coaches and career development leaders in employing organisations. These preliminary investigations did not find well-accepted measures for the impacts of career interventions with employed adults.

Measures like career decidedness, engagement with education and training, and moving towards employment are often relevant for young people, the unemployed or the low skilled. But they were not appropriate in this context where the coachees were all in work, and mostly highly trained.

The development phase therefore needed to:

- Create an underpinning logic model, or theory of change, for the evaluation to map the likely impacts for individuals and potential organisational outcomes of interest to the sponsoring organisation.
- Agree appropriate methods for data collection and how these would be administered to people working for many different organisations.
- Design and agree appropriate metrics, questions and conversation guides to be used in the chosen evaluation method(s).

Extensive discussions with the sponsoring organisation helped to clarify their aims for the intervention, which were initially rather general. The more specific aims then informed the logic model and the questions to be asked.

The coaching programme got underway before the evaluation could catch the very first coachees. Although less than ideal, this did give the opportunity for the project team to interview some of the coaches who had already conducted sessions with early users of the service. These early insights into the issues that coachees were voicing and the kinds of changes coaches were starting to see were extremely helpful in finalising the evaluation design.

Insights from literature

Literature on the factors influencing how adults make career decisions was relevant to identifying possible impacts of career coaching to include in the evaluation. The literature highlighted limitations on the rationality of decision-making and the role of chance (Mitchell et.al. 1999; Hodkinson, 2008) and the importance of general psychological state on career decision-making (Sampson et.al. 2013). It was useful to recognise that adults

may approach career decisions in varied ways (Bimrose et.al. 2007; Gloster et.al. 2013) and that the process is not necessarily linear or explicitly rational. Kidd's (2006) attention to career skills and attitudes was helpful in identifying how career coaching might help individuals develop their career management skills. Various versions of the Blueprint model were useful for constructing items around cognitive impact and career learning (see for example Hooley et.al., 2012). Hirschi's career resources model (2012) was especially relevant to the evaluation of an intervention intended to widen how coachees extend and use the resources available to them, especially their social networks.

Robertson's (2021) analysis of evaluation identifies outcomes of career development as potentially economic, educational, psychological and social. In this project, economic and social outcomes were relevant, especially at sector level, but not open to direct assessment in the short term. Psychological outcomes, seen by Robertson as including attitudinal, emotional and behavioural changes, were the focus of this project.

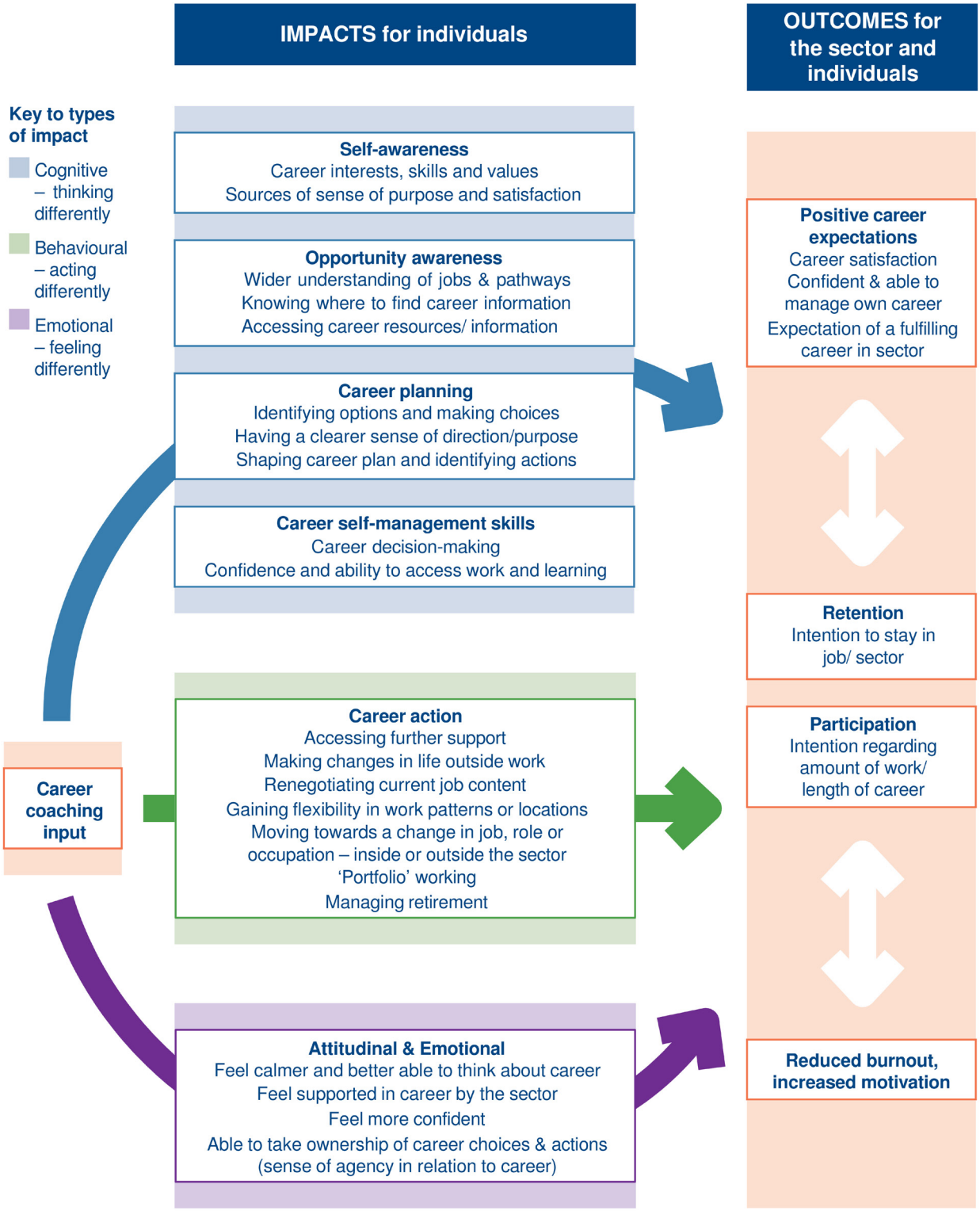
A focused rapid evidence review was conducted within the project looking specifically at the outcomes of employer-sponsored career development. This review, published by IES (Edwards & Carter, 2024), screened 30 articles, mostly from outside the UK, and summarised the 12 most relevant in detail. These papers examined whether developing career self-management necessarily increases career satisfaction (Renee Barnett & Bradley, 2007). De Vos et.al.(2009) emphasise the importance of seeing career management as a joint responsibility of employer and employee. The potential impact of career support on employee retention was of high interest in the project context. Some studies indicate that career support from an employer may increase external employability but not increase organisational commitment or retention (Rodrigues et.al., 2020). A large meta-analysis (Ng et.al., 2022) presents the alternative view, that organisational career development can positively affect perceived organisational support, organisational attachment and turnover intention. Interestingly this effect appeared to come from individuals being aware of the employer's offer of career support rather than from the actual impact of their participation in career development interventions.

Evaluation logic model

The evidence gathered from the literature, interviews with coaches and inputs from career development experts was used, in discussion with the sponsoring organisation, to build a logic model to underpin the evaluation.

The model, shown in Figure 1, identifies two sets of potential effects of the career coaching input. The term 'impacts' is used for the possible effects of career coaching on the individual coachee that one might expect to be relatively direct. The 'outcomes' on the right-hand side of the diagram are effects that seem unlikely to occur without some of the impacts happening first.

Figure 1. IES evaluation logic model



The **impacts** are divided into three broad categories:

- **Cognitive changes** in how the individual thinks about their career. This group is divided into self-awareness, opportunity awareness, career planning, and career management skills.
- **Emotional changes** in feelings and some attitudes. These include the coachee feeling supported in their career and able to take ownership of their career.
- **Behavioural changes** in the form of career actions: specific things the coachee is doing about their career.

These three categories are not intended as a watertight classification, but proved very useful in design, analysis, and communication. Thinking, feeling and acting differently was easy for everyone involved to remember. The logic model also highlights how impacts work together. Cognitive and emotional effects both drive changes in behaviour. Taking action also produces career learning and may make people feel more positive and further develop their career management skills.

On the right-hand side of the model, some possible **outcomes** are identified. These effects are likely to be mediated by impacts and might take longer to show. They included:

- **Positive career expectations** including self-assessed career satisfaction and expectations of being able to have a fulfilling career in the sector.
- **Staff retention** in terms of staying in the sector.
- **Participation** in terms of working hours and length of career in the sector. This was relevant because staff may stay in the sector but deal with stress by reducing their working hours.
- **Burnout** signifies feeling so stressed about work that carrying on becomes difficult.

These outcomes were potential effects on individuals but also significant for the sector and the aims of the intervention. Burnout, staff retention and participation were crucial issues for the sponsoring organisation. They also wanted staff to be able to navigate their careers within the sector and to expect a satisfying career.

The differences between impacts and outcomes are not always clear cut, but the outcome part of the model was a useful reminder that some of the most important potential effects may not happen very quickly and may be the result of several kinds of shorter-term impacts working together.

Data collection methods: survey, interviews and journalling

Once the logic model had been agreed, it was clear that a survey tool to collect self-reported data from each coachee over time would form the backbone of the evaluation. A survey could clearly reflect the evaluation logic model and would generate the quantitative data most relevant to the sponsor's needs. By using the same questions for all participants at different time points, including baseline data before coaching took place, it was hoped that significant changes could be tracked.

The evaluation was conducted in two phases, resulting from its extension by the sponsoring organisation. Across the whole study, the survey was given to every coachee before coaching (as they registered), after their final coaching session and again after a further 3-6 months. When the evaluation was extended for a further year a fourth time point was added for all coachees who were by then 1-2 years after finishing their coaching sessions. This was a rare and valuable opportunity to examine longer-term impacts. The content of the survey tool is shown later.

Semi-structured interviews were designed to provide richer, qualitative data. These took place once the coaching had finished. Individuals were asked by their coaches at that point if they would be happy to share their experiences of the coaching. With their permission, the coaches then passed on their details to the IES researchers so that interviews could be arranged. The initial round of interviews took place between December 2021 and February 2022. Participants were asked about their current role, why they accessed the coaching service, what actions they had undertaken since the coaching, and their hopes for their careers going forward. Follow-up interviews were sought with the same people 8-10 months after their initial interviews. These discussed what, if any, changes had occurred in their career decisions or actions, and what the role of the coaching was in any changes made. The interviews conducted were extremely useful, especially in giving the sponsoring body some early feedback, but the context of primary healthcare was a very difficult one in which to arrange as many interviews as originally hoped for. For this reason, interviews were not used in the second phase of the evaluation.

The project also used prompted journalling as a third, more experimental, method of data collection. Coachees were invited to reflect on their experiences of the intervention and write their own thoughts. This method was chosen as an alternative source of qualitative data if, as turned out to be the case, interviews proved difficult to fix. IES had recent positive experience of using journalling in other projects, including in coaching evaluation.

Journalling is naturally a good fit for the evaluation of a coaching intervention. It is well established in the adult learning literature that reflection is an important enabler of learning and change. Personal reflection is very much part of the philosophy of coaching, often used directly within the coaching process and recommended by most international coaching professional associations (Hullinger et. al., 2019). Reflection helps individuals focus their thinking and journalling stimulates such reflection.

Prompted journalling, seeking short inputs on a limited number of occasions from each participant, seemed likely to be a good fit for busy people. Specific prompts could also focus the responses on issues of most interest in the evaluation.

All coachees were prompted via email to reflect on just three questions at several time points in their journey: pre-coaching, up to three times during their coaching period (between coaching sessions), and after coaching. These time points were chosen to focus on change during the coaching period, not just before and after. During the second phase of the evaluation, all coachees who were by then 12 months or more after the end of their coaching were prompted for an additional journal entry. As with the survey, this was a chance to identify longer-term impacts.

The journalling questions, slightly adjusted to fit their timing, asked how the individual was feeling about their current job, how they were thinking about their future career, and what

they hoped to achieve, or had achieved through accessing the coaching. Responses were submitted as text online.

Content of the survey

It seems helpful here to share the survey questions in more detail for the benefit of readers who wish to evaluate career development interventions. The survey questions were built to cover the main components of the logic model, adjusting the content in a few places in the light of further information at that time. For example, a question on worklife balance was added after the early interviews with coaches, who found this topic came up frequently.

Rather than ask direct questions about intentions to stay, items about how close the individual was to changing their job were felt to be easier to answer and possibly more reliable. The career actions questions included items on portfolio working and moving towards retirement which shed potential light on the participation outcome.

There was a desire by the sponsoring organisation to use well established metrics where possible. Inventories for burnout and meaning at work were included, as referenced below.

IES career coaching survey

Cognitive and emotional impacts and career satisfaction outcomes were covered by a core set of questions as follows:

Thinking about your current work and career, please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statements [5 point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree]:

1. I am clear about the kinds of work activities I find interesting and enjoyable
2. I can articulate my skills and strengths
3. I can find and use relevant information about career opportunities
4. I access the support of others in managing my career
5. I have a clear sense of direction in my career
6. I know what actions I intend to make about my career
7. I achieve a good balance between my work life and my home life
8. I am confident in my ability to plan and manage my own career
9. I know how to make effective decisions relating to my career
10. I feel supported by [the sector] to develop my career
11. I feel in control of my choices about my work and career
12. I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career
13. I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my career goals
14. I expect to have a fulfilling career in [the sector]

Career actions were used to describe behavioural impacts. Retention and participation outcomes were informed by items 10 and 11 below.

These action questions asked: 'Below is a list of activities you may have engaged with when thinking about your career. Please indicate which activities you have carried out in the past two weeks' (yes/no response):

1. Had a conversation with someone I know well (family, friend, or close colleague) about my career
2. Extended my career network through my existing contacts, professional organisations, social media etc.
3. Had a conversation with my line manager, senior manager, or someone in HR in my organisation about my career
4. Accessed other personal support (e.g. for my health and wellbeing)
5. Researched career information
6. Made changes in life outside work
7. Made changes to my current job content
8. Gained flexibility in working hours
9. Gained flexibility in location of work
10. Moved towards working fewer hours in my current job, combined with taking on other paid or unpaid work, inside or outside [the sector] (i.e. 'portfolio' career opportunities)
11. Made preparations for retirement or moved towards a phased retirement

Moving towards job change, a proxy for retention, was assessed through two questions as follows:

The following scales represent distinct stages of moving towards a change in job, role, or occupation either within or outside [the sector]. Please indicate where you currently are on the scale:

1. Changing job, role, or occupation within [the sector]
2. Changing job, role, or occupation outside [the sector]

These were each scored 1-5 as follows: not currently thinking about a change, thinking about a change, searching for a new job, applying for a new job, accepting a job offer.

In addition, the survey included two open-access, valid and reliable inventories: the seven work-related items of the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Kristensen et.al., 2005), and the ten items in the Work as Meaning Inventory (Steger et.al., 2012).

Reflections towards the end of this paper include some suggestions about how this survey might be further developed and adapted to different contexts.

Managing ethical issues and data collection

The sponsoring organisation did not require formal ethics committee approval for a programme evaluation. The project was discussed and approved by the IES ethics committee. The evaluation was introduced to all coachees at the point they signed up through the IT platform that supported the management of the coaching programme. Coachees were given a briefing note and privacy notice, including the role of IES and how their data would be handled. They could opt out of the evaluation at any point without needing to give a reason.

An individual ID number was assigned by the IT platform provider to each coachee as they started the programme, and these were used to match up each person's survey data from different time points.

At the specified times on their own coaching journey, coachees were sent links to submit their survey and journalling data online. Surveys were completed on the IT platform provider's website and the anonymised data were forwarded to IES. Journal entries were typed by coachees into a protected area of the IES website, again using individual ID numbers. At no point did IES have access to the names of those providing data.

Quotes from interviews and journal entries were used in reports to the sponsoring organisation but without names or other information that could identify the person.

In reporting the survey, results were not broken down by occupation or demographic variables as each cell would be too small for robust statistical analysis and might potentially identify individuals.

Data sets and analysis

Data collection ran from January 2022 to January 2024. Early findings were presented in March 2022, with two main phases of analysis and reporting in spring 2023 and spring 2024. Over both phases of the project, the data included:

- Pre-coaching survey data from 1,248 coachees. Of these, 124 also completed the survey immediately post-coaching, 62 in the first phase of the project and 62 in the second phase. 54 coachees completed the survey 3-6 months after finishing coaching (not all of whom also completed it immediately after coaching). 51 coachees from the first phase completed the survey 1-2 years after finishing coaching in the longer-term follow up.
- Thirteen post-coaching interviews, and a follow-up interview with nine of these same coachees held 8-10 months later. Analysis of these nine matched pairs of interviews looked for cognitive, emotional and behavioural impacts and potential implications for NHS outcomes. As explained earlier, there was no interview data from new coachees starting in the second phase of evaluation.
- Over 300 journal entries from over 220 coachees, covering times before, during and after coaching. Different individuals chose to respond to different prompts giving a mix of times for journal entries. 21 entries came from the additional journal prompt sent to coachees 1-2 years after their coaching finished.

The evolving nature of the project over two phases and its extended timeframe led to unusually complex data sets. Although all coachees were invited to participate in the survey and journalling at all time points relevant to them, different individuals chose to respond to prompts at different time points. Priority was given to analysing data that could show changes for the same coachees over specific phases of their coaching journey i.e. matched data for the same individuals at different time points.

Although 124 coachees (about 10% of those invited to do so) voluntarily completed the post-coaching survey, far fewer participated at every time point they were asked. Two ways of selecting matched data from the survey proved especially useful and are the basis of the findings summarised later. Firstly, short-term impact was assessed by comparing pre- and post- coaching survey results from the same individuals. These findings were very similar for the 62 people completing both these surveys in phase 1 and the separate analysis of 62 different coachees doing likewise in phase 2. Secondly, longer-term impact was examined by using data from the 51 coachees who had completed both a pre-coaching survey and responded again 1-2 years after coaching.

The journal entries from both phases of data collection were analysed using an inductive thematic approach. In phase 1, material from four individuals submitting three or more entries were composed into 'vignettes': short narrative accounts of a single person's experience over time, often including verbatim quotes. These were a quick and powerful way of communicating individuals' concerns, motivations and some early actions and impacts. They had a significant effect on the sponsoring organisation's plans for the programme and its further evaluation. Vignettes were added for seven phase 2 coachees who submitted at least four journal entries. Special attention was also paid to the 21 entries from individuals who responded to the longer-term prompt, 1-2 years after their coaching finished.

Summary results

Cognitive impacts were clearly seen in both short-term and longer-term survey results. The strongest positive changes after coaching were in career planning, having a better sense of career direction and understanding actions needed to move their career forward. Individuals also reported improved career management skills and later on a clearer sense of career direction, work interests and ability to articulate their strengths.

The journalling data also highlighted action planning, a better awareness of opportunities and a deeper understanding of how to overcome barriers to career development. Finding and using information on career opportunities emerged as quite challenging in such a complex and fragmented sector. The information available was neither comprehensive nor well integrated.

Early **behavioural changes** included coachees having a career conversation with someone in their organisation (as opposed to people they already knew well outside work) and moving towards changes to their current job content. Extending networks, changes made outside work and improving worklife balance were evident in both short-term and longer-term survey data. Accessing support from others was a strong

behaviour post-coaching from all the data sources. Later journalling started to show preparations towards changing job roles in some cases, with others continuing to renegotiate their current job content and some accessing the development they needed to progress.

Some **emotional** impacts around feeling more confident and calmer showed up quickly in the interviews and journalling. The relevant items in the survey showed more limited and slower change with modest improvement in feeling more supported in career development. One would not expect that to change quickly. More general confidence and resilience were themes in the journalling, but these impacts were not explicitly covered by the survey questions.

In terms of the **outcomes**, short-term survey findings showed some reported progress towards meeting career goals but not yet improvement in career satisfaction, expectations of having a positive future career or any reduction in burnout. These findings did not surprise the IES team. In the data collected at least a year after coaching, there was movement in career satisfaction, especially satisfaction around career achievements and progress towards goals. There was also some drop in burnout and some increase in finding work meaningful.

Looking across all the data sources an early effect of career coaching might have been to increase intention to stay in the current job or at least to be more considered in approaching a possible job move. The journalling and interview data showed some examples of potential retention, at least in the short term, but other coachees were deciding to leave the sector. The longer-term survey data showed a clearer reduction in considering a change of role, both within and outside the sector.

The findings on possible improvements in career satisfaction and staff retention are good news, but it is difficult to know if these might be influenced by changes in the primary healthcare system after the immediate post-Covid period to deal more effectively with continuing high levels of demand. As expected, some coachees moved towards so-called 'portfolio working' after coaching – working fewer hours in their current role combined with other paid or unpaid work inside or outside the sector. This hints at reduced participation being a price paid by the primary healthcare sector for retaining some staff.

In summary then this study showed significant and positive cognitive and behavioural impacts following coaching, although of course this is not proof of cause and effect. Increases in career satisfaction seemed slower to come but some showed up in the longer-term data, a year or two after coaching. This was also the case for a possible improvement in staff retention and reduction in burnout.

Reflections and suggestions

The remainder of this article reflects on the learning from this evaluation experience and how the approach might be adapted in other contexts.

Agreeing the purpose of a career intervention is important to collecting and feeding back relevant data to the sponsoring organisation or employer. The logic model with its articulation of impacts and outcomes proved useful in this study, as did the loose classification of impacts into cognitive, emotional and behavioural.

Three methods were used for collecting evaluation data in this case example: interviews, journalling, and a survey. Having at least one qualitative method can provide some insights very quickly.

Interviews proved too difficult to fix in large numbers in this study but could work well in many other contexts, especially in smaller scale interventions. Knowing how interview data will be analysed is an important part of evaluation design.

Journalling was a more exploratory method and turned out to be attractive both to the coachees and to the sponsoring organisation. It offered coachees a chance to reflect and seemed to be easier than interviews to fit into busy working lives. The journalling vignettes showed powerfully how cognitive, emotional and behavioural changes worked together for individuals during and beyond their period of coaching. The vignettes, each being a personal story, had high impact on the programme sponsors, being both vivid and memorable.

It is crucial to collect some 'baseline' data before the intervention although timing this can be challenging. Over the whole study, IES collaborated closely with the providers of the IT platform who sent out the communications to the coachees. Sending more than one data collection link to an individual in a single email resulted in fewer responses. It was better to send each data request separately, even if close together in time.

The survey method generally worked well, especially by using the same survey at different time points with the ability to join up data for the same person using their unique ID. This matched data approach meant that if a mean score changed significantly, this was because the same people gave different responses over time, not because different people had filled in the survey at different time points (as would be likely in a cross-sectional approach).

Even with considerable attention to follow up, getting large enough survey samples of post-coaching data was very challenging, especially at the longer-term time point. However, it was the longer-term data that started to show some of the changes of greatest interest to the sponsoring organisation. The extra effort to extend the evaluation timeframe was therefore very worthwhile.

Even in work settings where large scale surveys would not be possible, short questionnaires developed from the tool shown here could be used within or alongside an interview or group discussion.

It takes discipline to design a survey short enough to be acceptable in a work setting. The 17 questions from the two inventories used in this study were of particular interest in this sector at the time but took up a lot of space and would not be necessary in all contexts.

Suggestions on refining the survey tool

The experience of this project leads to some specific suggestions for adjusting the survey questions as follows:

- **Personal confidence** should be added e.g. 'I feel confident about myself.' It was in the logic model and often mentioned in interviews and journalling.
- 'I feel **calm** enough to think clearly about my career' was in the model and would be worth considering. Coachees often reported how helpful it was for them to slow down and not jump to a quick career decision.
- **Job satisfaction** would be a useful outcome measure e.g. 'Overall I feel satisfied with my job.' It might reflect the outcomes of varied changes made at work and complement the questions used on career satisfaction.
- In terms of **outcomes** beyond job and career satisfaction, retention is an important outcome in most contexts and should be kept in the survey. Other outcomes to include will vary according to context and employer interest e.g. stress or burnout, wellbeing, employee engagement or commitment, motivation, sense of purpose or meaning in work.
- The list of **career action** items could be tailored to context. Accessing support from others and making changes inside or outside work will be relevant in most settings. 'Portfolio' working, for example, was of specific relevance to this study.
- The two questions on **moving towards job change** should ask more clearly whether a job move had happened. The scale stopped at 'accepting a job offer' but could be extended to include 'have made a job move.'

The evaluation data described here was subjective, being self-assessed. There was no viable way in this study of comparing attitudinal data with objective personnel data, for example on retention, job movement, promotion or participation in formal training. In other contexts this might be possible with care.

The early input from coaches provided a different perspective. If resources had permitted, it would have been valuable to gain fuller insights from coaches as the programme went on, perhaps through more group discussions.

The longer-term findings were of very high interest, but one cannot assume all the longer-term changes were influenced by the coaching. Some of the improvements in career satisfaction and burnout may have been due to some easing of stress in the sector. In some settings including a few career-related questions in attitude surveys sent to all employees, might help to show if changes for employees who have used an intervention are different from the wider workforce.

Close working between the IES team and the sponsoring organisation was essential, especially in designing the project and in feeding through results. Interim reports and presentations were useful markers along the way of what was emerging. The final report

wrapped as much of the data together as possible to give a balanced overall picture but also to document the evaluation process.

Although much of the learning about evaluation methods should be of value to others, we cannot assume that the findings of this evaluation can be generalised. The limited survey response rates were high enough to show statistically significant change for the same individuals over time, but the experiences of those choosing to send in the survey were not necessarily representative of all coachees. The occupations and work context of any workplace intervention are inevitably specific. So we need more studies of this kind in different contexts to add to our evidence base.

Evaluation is a challenging activity but fascinating and of huge value to organisations supporting career development at work. It can be readily adapted in scale and sophistication to fit the context. The authors of this paper hope that readers feel empowered to use and further develop some of the tools presented here and to share what they learn.

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