

Distinctions in practice within coaching in Wales

Article

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Distinctions in Practice within Coaching in Wales

David Tee, Jonathan Passmore and Hazel Brown

Abstract

This research sought to identify distinctions in the practice of coaches within Wales, compared to other European nations. A survey design was adopted, with a snowball sampling strategy generating 150 respondents. Seven surveyed aspects of coaching practice produced distinctive responses from coaches within Wales: they are less likely to have membership of any professional coaching bodies, they spend a very small proportion of their working time coaching, they are more likely to operate as internal coaches or for low fees, they are more likely to engage in self-reflection and participate in peer networks, they have a marked preference for behavioural/goal-focused methods, they are thorough in the range of topics they cover when contracting and they are likely to be selected as coaches based predominantly upon their experience levels. Recommendations are made for future analytical research to identify causal factors for these distinctions.

Keywords: *coaching, Wales, Europe, national distinctions*

Introduction

Although coaching psychology has sometimes been defined as a distinct set of practices, where psychological evidence-based theories and approaches inform the work that the practitioner does with their clients (cf. Lai, 2014), other definitions frame coaching psychology as bringing scientific scrutiny and research methods to enlighten our understanding of all practice within coaching (cf. Passmore, 2010). Situated within the latter conceptualisation of coaching psychology, this present research is intended as one of a short series of articles for *The Coaching Psychologist*. These articles will provide an overview of distinct contemporary coach practices in each of the United Kingdom home nations.

The data being analysed for national distinctions was generated during a wider 45 nation research study (Passmore, Brown, Csigas et al., 2017) commissioned by the European Coaching and Mentoring Council (EMCC) and led by Henley Business School.

The study

The purpose of the multi-nation research, undertaken in collaboration with the wider European coaching and mentoring industry, was to deepen understanding of coaching and mentoring attitudes and practice across different European nations, as well as to identify and celebrate the diversity in approach across these regions. Passmore et al. (ibid.) identify this diversity as a strength, advocating an avoidance of any desire to impose a rigid global framework onto the coaching industry.

The research was conducted against a backdrop of sustained growth in coaching across Europe and the wider world: Garvey, Stokes and Megginson (2018) point to a range of reports in recent years indicating the continuing increase in use of coaching as a developmental intervention (cf. Sherpa Coaching, 2016; ICF Global Coaching Study, 2016). In terms of the number of practising coaches, Europe is the leading region, with the International Coaching Federation (ibid.) suggesting it holds 42% of the global coaching population (with North America second at 33%). Details of the findings across Europe can be found in Passmore et al. (2017). In light of the research aim to identify any diversity in practice within specific nations within Europe, this research article focuses on the specific findings for Wales and compares them with European mean results.

Wales

Given the global readership of *The Coaching Psychologist*, it is worth providing a very brief overview of Wales. Wales is one of four nations within the United Kingdom (UK), bordered by the Irish Sea to the west and England to the east. Sixteenth century laws saw it constitutionally join with what would ultimately become the UK, although the establishment of a devolved Welsh Assembly in 1999 has resulted in increased autonomy in recent decades. Wales is a relatively small European nation of 8,023 square miles, much of the centre of which is mountainous, resulting in the population (3,063,456 in the most recent UK census) being predominantly located along the north and south coastal zones.

Wales and coaching

The response rate for the European research study suggests an active coaching profession within Wales (the third highest response rate across the 45 nations). However, the national coaching community does not have any Wales-specific professional coaching body, nor any dedicated coaching practitioner or research journal. Similarly, none of the eight universities in Wales currently offer an MSc coaching qualification. However, University of South Wales (USW), the sixth largest university in the UK, does have a fledgling coaching unit: this features a number of doctoral candidates, the provision of postgraduate certificate and diploma programmes in conjunction with the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) and the hosting for the last five years (co-hosting with Academi Wales since 2017) of the Annual Welsh Coaching Conference each March, attracting over 200 delegates.

The various professional coaching bodies have some presence within Wales. The EMCC has a North Wales regional group and the Association for Coaching (AC) runs a co-coaching group in South Wales. The SGCP does not presently have a peer practice group running within the nation. Where membership information for professional bodies is in the public domain, the AC has 85 members in Wales (Passmore, Brown & Tee, 2018) and the SGCP has four registered coaching psychologists listed in Wales (as of March 2018). Several non-affiliated regional groups, such as the West Wales Coaching Collaborative, also operate.

A data-driven understanding of norms and trends within Wales may serve several useful functions. Firstly, coaching psychology has been criticised for lacking methodological rigour (Briner, 2012), with the need for more empirical research to facilitate the building of an evidence base. The generation of descriptive empirical data can inform coaching psychologists wishing to conduct further analytical research concerning national distinctive norms and preferences, allowing them to operate from a foundation level of knowledge as to where any such distinctions might exist. Secondly, this understanding can also inform organisational stakeholders, such as coaching qualification awarders, professional coaching bodies and employers running large internal coaching programmes, as to where there are strengths in practice and gaps or potential issues where interventions, such as changes in qualification assessment criteria, may be justified. Finally, it allows individual coaches and coaching psychologists to compare their own practice against the norms for the nation within which they operate.

Method

A survey method was deployed using an original questionnaire to generate empirical descriptive data. Full details of the method for the pan-European study are provided in Passmore et al. (2017), with the 'Wales' data subset being analysed for this present research.

Participants

Participants were sought through existing coaching networks, via professional bodies, educational hubs, conference platforms and online social media groups.

Specifically for the Wales data subset, the questionnaire was electronically distributed, initially through research partners within Wales, but with a 'snowball' sampling strategy deployed to encourage participation. There were 150 respondents who identified as coaching within Wales, the mode age was 30-49 and 64.4% were female.

Materials

The survey items were designed by the researchers in collaboration with the EMCC. Twenty-six aspects of coaching practice were explored using closed questions and a range of scales, all designed to generate solely empirical data. The survey instrument was uploaded to the Internet and made available to potential participants via a publicized link.

Procedure

Members of the national coaching community were reached out to via a range of networking and publicity methods. All data from participants who self-identified as operating within Wales were included. The survey instrument was only distributed electronically, with participants taking a mean time of twenty five minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Findings and Discussion

As well as seeking to gain an understanding of trends and preferences in the coaching community across Europe, the purpose of the overarching research was to

allow insights into variances in practice within individual nations. Focusing on the survey data for Wales and contrasting it with the rest of Great Britain (Scotland and England - labelled in the following tables as 'RoGB') and also the rest of Europe (labelled 'RoE'), a number of themes emerge.

1. The majority of respondents do not belong to a professional coaching body

57% of Wales respondents were not members of any coaching professional body. This contrasts with 28% of respondents from RoGB and 31% from RoE. The professional body with the largest membership (AC: $N=34$) is also the one with the most active regional group, so it may be that membership is largely driven by the opportunity to meet, support and share best practice with fellow members of the coaching community. For many years, the AC has also had a presence at regional events, such as the Annual Welsh Coaching Conference, so membership may also be partially driven by a perception that professional bodies need to be visible and actively engage with the Wales coaching community.

Table 1: Membership of professional coaching bodies

	Wales	RoGB	RoE
None	85	267	628
AC	34	262	62
Other	14	86	428
EMCC	12	139	211
SGCP	3	69	11
ICF	2	71	638
ISCP	0	12	13
APECS	0	42	11
WABC	0	7	30

Given the role that these professional bodies seek to play, the very low engagement levels in Wales mean there are many coaches that are not, for example, bound by codes of ethical conduct or required to evidence their ongoing investment in professional development in order to renew their membership. Such factors may arguably have an impact on the quality or the quality assurance mechanisms present within coaching in Wales.

2. Practising coaches in Wales typically spend less of their working time coaching

Only 5.4% of Wales coaches spend over 40% of their working time coaching. In contrast, 30% spend 5% of their time coaching and 35% spend 10% of their time coaching. Compared to the results for RoGB and RoE, this suggests that those who coach in Wales spend a much lower mean amount of their working life engaged in coaching.

Table 2: Percentage of working time spent delivering coaching

	Wales	RoGB	RoE
0%	0.9	2.3	1.0
5%	29.9	16.3	8.1
10%	35.0	24.4	16.8
20%	17.1	14.0	21.9
30%	6.8	14.2	17.8
40%	5.1	7.9	8.6
50%	1.7	10.1	8.9
60%	3.4	4.0	5.7
70%	0.1	3.2	4.6
80%	0.1	1.5	3.7

90%	0.1	1.7	1.6
100%	0.1	0.5	1.2

It would be of interest to research further as to the reasons why the time spent coaching in Wales is lower. Further data may reveal whether this is determined by personal choice on the part of the coach, the level of demand for coaching services in Wales, competing considerations for the practitioner's working time or some other factor.

3. Corporate client coaching in Wales attracts lower fee rates

78.2% of coaches in Wales either coached within their own organisation, for no charge or for a charge of below €50 p/h. The ability to disaggregate the data to separate the number of respondents who worked as internal practitioners would be useful in gaining an understanding of the financial investment that corporate clients are willing to invest in external coaching provision. Nonetheless, given that organisations in both RoGB and RoE are also building internal coaching capacity, this survey data suggests a distinct difference in the market rates for coaching in Wales compared to the mean investment willing to be made across Europe.

Table 3: Fee rates for corporate clients per hour (p/h)

	Wales	RoGB	RoE
Internal coach/no charge	52.1	11.6	9.2
<€50 p/h	26.1	1.6	5.2
€51-100 p/h	2.5	10.8	15.5
€101-199 p/h	10.9	15.5	26.9
€200-399 p/h	5.9	21.5	19.1

€400-599 p/h	0.8	9.4	4.3
€600-799 p/h	1.7	2.1	1.2
€800-999 p/h	0.0	1.8	0.4
>€1000 p/h	0.0	0.4	0.1

Further research could explore why coaching may be undervalued in Wales, what the perceived and actual benefits are reported to be by commissioners and users of coaching services and what role, if any, the limiting beliefs of coaches in Wales may play in keeping fees uncommonly low.

4. Coaches in Wales disproportionately invest in reflective practice

The survey data suggest that the three main tools for reflective practice are the same across Wales, RoGB and RoE, even if the ordering may alter: self reflection, peer networking and reading coaching books. However, in terms of the percentage of coaches that report using each method, for the two highest rated practices (self reflection and peer networks), the Wales percentages are at least 10% higher than those reported for RoGB and RoE in both instances.

Table 4: Methods used to reflect on your practice (respondents could select more than one option)

	Wales	RoGB	RoE
Self reflection	80.6	69.8	70.3
Peer network	67.3	56.0	53.7
Read coaching books	53.3	61.0	62.2
Read coaching research	43.3	50.4	42.8
Self support	31.3	31.0	23.9
Formal supervision with qualified supervisor	28	43.6	30.5
Mentor	10.6	14.4	21.7

Co-mentoring	10.6	10.4	11.1
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For the peer networking result (67.3%), further research could determine the extent to which this is conducted virtually or face-to-face. If the latter, it may indicate geographic concentrations of coaching practice not found in other nations. Future research could also explore why coaches in Wales see such uncommonly widespread value in self-reflection as a tool for enhancing practice.

5. There is a disproportionate use of behavioural/goal-focused models in Wales

Although behavioural/goal-focused models are reported as the most widely used across all three geographic regions, with solution-focused coaching being ranked second, the extent of the preference is more pronounced in Wales. The gap in percentage scores suggests a 41.4% preference for goal-focused approaches, contrasted with 21.5% in RoGB and 16.9% in RoE.

**Table 5: Models used in respondents' coaching practice
(respondents could select more than one option)**

	Wales	RoGB	RoE
Behavioural/Goal-focused (e.g. GROW)	74.7	62.6	59.3
Solution-focused	33.3	41.1	42.4
Transactional Analysis	32	30.8	19.6
Neuro-linguistic programming	30	29.9	29.8
Cognitive Behavioural	24.7	27.4	30.6

Motivational interviewing	16	12.0	16.2
Gestalt	9.3	16.5	12.8
Psychodynamic	6.7	10.1	7.5
Transpersonal	4.7	9.2	6.5
Existential	1.3	4.8	8.1
Other	14	16	18

This domination of behavioural and goal-focused approaches in Wales may partially explain why Wales rates the lowest for the number of practitioners that use gestalt, psychodynamic, transpersonal or existential approaches in their coaching work, compared with RoGB and RoE. The ethos of this research was to capture and celebrate the diversity in coaching cultures across Europe: the data for Wales suggests it takes a lead in homogeneously adopting goal-focused approaches to coaching.

6. *Coaches in Wales are thorough in their contracting with clients*

The survey asked respondents the extent to which they explicitly cover certain topics when contracting with clients. Seven discreet topics were listed, ranging from what is treated as confidential through to session cancellation arrangements. For all seven topics, coaches in Wales responded as being more likely to explicitly cover these in contracting than did RoGB or RoE coaches.

**Table 6: Topics explicitly included in respondents' contracts with clients
(respondents could select more than one option)**

	Wales	RoGB	RoE
The responsibilities of the different parties involved	79.3	68.6	68.6
What is confidential information and not to be shared outside	73.3	67.8	65
What is coaching?	72.7	66.6	61.8
What would not be confidential and could be shared by the coach outside the sessions with appropriate agencies	64.7	49.6	32.2
The cancellation arrangements for a session	60.7	53.5	57.7
How the client will evaluate the value of the coaching	52	47.8	35.6
How the client can complain about the coach	41.3	35	22.1

Coaches in Wales reported a 7.9% increased likelihood to cover the contracting topics compared with RoGB coaches and 14.4% compared to RoE coaches. Given the earlier discussed findings about increased engagement in reflective practice techniques, these data suggest that coaches in Wales do engage in much of what the literature advocates as best practice, despite the majority of them not being affiliated to any encouraging or enforcing professional coaching body. Further research could explore what might drive such conduct within Wales.

7. Experience is key in Wales

Respondents were asked to state the important factors when commissioning coaching, with five options being available. For RoGB and RoE respondents, all five options were selected to varying extents. In significant contrast, respondents from

Wales only selected two of the five options, with 'Experience of the provider', 'Price' and 'Membership of a professional body' all rated as 0%.

For the options that were chosen by Wales respondents, 17% stated that 'Professional qualification of the individual coach' was important (compared with 14.4% for RoGB and 25.2% for RoE). However, 'Experience of the coach' was rated as important by 83% (contrasted with RoGB: 47%, RoE: 40%). This set of responses is probably the starkest differentiator, setting Wales apart from the other 45 responder nations.

Table 7: The most important factor when commissioning coaching

	Wales	RoGB	RoE
Experience of the coach	83.0	47.0	40.0
Professional qualifications of the individual coach	17.0	14.4	25.2
Experience of the provider	0.0	18.3	14.0
Price	0.0	10.8	10.3
Member of a professional body	0	9.7	9.5

It may be that price is not considered an important factor because the survey data suggest the financial investment made for coaching is much lower in Wales, so this becomes less likely to act as a barrier to access. It may also be that there is a transactional relationship between commissioners of coaching not considering

membership of a professional body important and coaches not therefore experiencing a financial incentive to join these bodies.

Conclusions

The 'State of Play in European Coaching' research elicited responses from thousands of coaches across Europe, with survey items exploring a range of different aspects of coaching practice. Whilst the full dataset points to many areas of convergence in practice between coaches in Wales and their counterparts in other European nations (an example might be the prevalence of engagement with coaching supervisors – see Passmore, Brown & Tee, 2018 for full Wales results), this article has purposefully focused upon aspects of the data that suggest distinctions that may capture the uniqueness of current norms in Wales's coaching industry.

The research findings point to a nation where coaches typically coach for a small proportion of their working time, would not expect to attract significant fees for their work, are not inclined to belong to professional coaching bodies and whose worth is often judged by the amount of experience they have as coaches. Nevertheless, they might uncommonly be expected to actively engage in a range of reflective practices and to demonstrate conscientious best practice in aspects of their craft such as thorough contracting. Finally, they exhibit a marked bias towards behavioural/goal-focused approaches when coaching clients.

Reflections and areas for further investigation

These findings provide data for new insights into the diversity of coaching industry norms from nation to nation, but are solely descriptive in nature: seeking to capture what is happening within Wales at the point of data collection. Further analytic research might inquire into the causes, motivations, enabling and restraining factors, be they at individual, organisational or societal levels, which might be shaping these responses and creating the differences in preference and emphasis in how coaching is carried out in Wales.

Furthermore, the data were generated using a single non-validated data gathering instrument. Whilst it was crafted by experienced researchers within the coaching psychology field, the nature of the instrument may cause other coaching psychologists to examine its rigour (cf. Gray, Garvey & Lane, 2016). However, the same instrument was adopted across the European nations and, as descriptive insight, the data set does allow the comparison of means in responses from nation to nation. With a backdrop of debate within coaching psychology as to what high quality research may be (Corrie & Webster, 2016) and descriptive research argued to often be a precursor to analytic research (Collis & Hussey, 2003), the data from this study may be a catalyst for more sophisticated, explanatory or predictive future coaching psychology research.

Finally, a series of implications for practice or for further potential research areas were highlighted, topic by topic, in this article's 'Findings and Discussion' section. Beyond those topic-specific recommendations, it can be argued that coaching psychology research should have a role in advancing practice standards within coaching. By highlighting aspects of coaching craft where Wales (or any other single nation) has a disproportionate engagement (in the instance of Wales, such as

rigorous contracting or the use of self-reflection), research activity can be channelled towards regions where benchmark practice is conducted in an attempt to understand, disseminate and thereby allow more widespread adoption of these standards across nations.

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