

Academic Paper

Paternal Coaching During the Transition to Fatherhood

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Abstract

The transition to parenthood is one of the most joyful, yet stressful life events, however, there is little evidence to support paternity coaching as an intervention. This action research study draws on gender studies and maternity and transition coaching literature to inform the research. A cohort of four fathers participated in the research, each receiving three coaching sessions, followed by an interview. Themes emerging were responsibility, self-care and adapting to the new role. Practitioners and academics will find the research helps in understanding the themes supporting transition coaching for fathers, and in identifying further gaps for future research.

Keywords

fatherhood, paternity coaching, parental coaching, transition coaching,

Article history

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Introduction

The transition to parenthood is one of the most transformative life events a person can make, both in terms of stress and joy (Cowan and Cowan, 1995; Glass et al., 2016; Nelson et al., 2013; Simpson & Rholes, 2019). As such, organisations are paying more attention to better supporting this transition; one option is through 'Parental Transition Coaching'. A subset of this, maternity coaching, has been evident since around 2005 in the UK (Hall, 2009; Sparrow, 2008), with companies like EY and Deutsche Bank in the financial industry demonstrating a positive impact (Parke, 2012; Sullivan, 2015). There is a slim body of academic research exploring maternity coaching (Cotter, 2015; Filsinger-Mohun, 2012; Liston-Smith, 2011, 2012; Moffett, 2018; Sparrow, 2008, 2009;).

Coaching initiatives focused on the transition to fatherhood are emergent as a practice (Motion Learning, 2019), with van Nieuwerburgh (2015) predicting a rise in the demand. The experience of fathers in the workplace is being reported in the media with titles such as; 'No-one asks new dads how they are feeling at work' (BBC, 2019) citing mental health as a concern and 'The Bosses Who Walk the Walk on Paternity Leave' (Shellenbarger, 2019) which looked at role-models. Despite the

rise of interest in the media, there is a lack of empirical evidence and literature to support an evidence-base for coaching best-practice. For these reasons it is timely to explore the experience of the transition to fatherhood as a coaching intervention to understand the key themes that emerge to establish an evidence base from which to offer coaching to fathers within a workplace context.

The research took place in a single global publishing company where there is a parenthood policy in place with the participants and the researcher all working for the same company. There were with four volunteer participants across three locations: America, UK and Germany all having had a new baby in the last 12 months.

Due to the lack of research pertaining directly to paternity coaching the literature review draws upon other areas of academic research to inform the gap. The framework for the study explores literature from the fields of coaching but also gender studies and family studies. Specifically the literature explore transitions to parenthood, specifically fatherhood, the concept of balancing work/life, then the more specific coaching areas of transition coaching and finally maternity coaching literature. By taking this broad approach the study relies on combining key aspects to inform the research design and thinking.

The transition to parenthood as a life event is an expectation in many cultures. Women are expected to pursue this as a 'source of fulfilment' (Peterson, 2003) and fertile men are seen as successful (Bigner, 2014). Country-specific legislation and societal norms guide this transition, often based on decades of cultural practice. Legislation guides parental leave and the return to work requirements, shaping the parenthood policies at an organisation. In global companies differences between maternity leave for example creates a disparity in experience and understanding. In the UK the primary caregiver can take up to a year on leave, yet in the US it is considerably less depending on the state. Because of the legal and cultural drivers, the majority of parenthood research is country-specific (Gillies, 2009) researchers can find insights from this literature that may be relevant despite the location-specific context.

This transition represents a period of time where there is a permanent adjustment to the norm, and a shift in the levels of stress relating to that experience (Holmes and Rahe, 1967; Dohrenwend et al. 1978; Price et al., 2000; Rodgers and White, 2009) with the transition being one of the most stressful times of a man's life (Condon et al. 2004). In terms of the impact on new parents Brotherson (2004) has gone further suggesting that the although the transition presents themes that are similar for both women and men the differences for men lie in the need to provide financially and the loss of free time.

The transition to fatherhood can happen over a larger age range than for motherhood, it is often assumed that this transition is assumed to be through choice and 'optional' (Liston-Smith, 2011), Moffett (2018) looks at transition of becoming a mother and ascertains that according to Schlossberg the change (becoming a mother) is classed as significant.

Gender roles have shifted, and the expectations of what fatherhood means has changed (Eerola, 2014). Influencing factors include the rise in divorce and remarriage in the 1960s shifting the construct of the family (Greenwood et al, 2016) and changes to expectations regarding women entering the workforce with availability of part-time work, childcare and a change of attitudes and policies (Smeaton, 2006).

The transition to fatherhood brings with it the experience of a change in role, although a dominance of cultural stereotypes regarding masculinity still influence how fathers should behave (Habib, 2012; Jain et al., 1996). Miller (2011a) discusses gender discourse summarising that the developments in gender studies that have been most impactful are the shifts in attitude around gender categories.

From the early stages of transition to fatherhood, expectant fathers have concerns around how to balance being a father and work (Fägerskiöld, 2008; Miller, 2011). Legislation promoting an involved father is evident in many countries (Gillies, 2009), enabling fathers to balance these concerns, yet the uptake of even paid parental leave is often optional resulting in an unaltered gender discourse. Endendijk et al's (2018) longitudinal found that the stereotypes relating to gender roles and behaviours intensify following the transitions to parenthood, fuelling the gender debate. Miller's (2011b) qualitative longitudinal research in the UK explores the experience of 17 first-time fathers presenting the transition as both a complex and often confusing period for fathers that differs to mothers. The practical needs of caring for a child - and the false correlation between the age of a baby and the demands it makes - showing a naivety amongst fathers about how they can balance home and work. Awareness of this potential misconception in the early stages of a baby's life may help in coaching the challenges a father may experience at this time.

The transition to parenthood is often cited as a 'we', a shared experience (Belsky and Kelly, 1994) but the reality is that the experience is different both physically and emotionally for each parent, calling on couples to support each other in uncharted territory (Fox, 2009). Areas causing disagreement such as the division of labour, money, work, relationship and social life (Belsky and Kelly, 1994) compounded by the return to work for fathers, creates an asymmetric relationship that a couple may find a challenge to adjust to.

Townsend (2002) states that of the four facets of fatherhood; 'emotional closeness, provision, protection and endowment', men stated that 'provision' is the most important. Generational expectations of work performance from fathers is very different, Liston-Smith (2012) suggests that generation Y have wildly different expectations when it comes to integrating life and work. This generation might 'embrace parenthood while forging leadership roles built on developmental foundations, or simply relish the personal growth and fulfilment in being a parent in and of itself'. Research focusing on first-time fathers with the intention to reject the traditional role, shows the struggle that occurs following the birth of a child, a return to work and subsequent work demands (Miller, 2011b; Endendijk et al. 2018). Henwood and Procter (2003) identify a tension between the desire to spend time with their children and the value placed on their work life. Miller (2011a) states that the transition to fatherhood in the work environment can be a challenge where employers expect a fully present worker, and the father must balance this with the demands of being a 'new man' present father. Babies change very quickly in the early weeks and months, Miller (2011b) observes that as men return to work they are less present for these (daily) changes and can feel out of touch quickly. The consequence of this is a reinforcement of gender stereotypes as mothers recognize the changing needs of the infant and fathers feel more removed, childcare expectations being mediated through the mother. In this instance competing workplace and family demands fuelled by sleep deprivation, lead to a division of family labour where economic provision has greater emphasis than the pre-paternal expectations. The implications here for paternity coaching are strong, whilst this shift in role is occurring in those early months, themes for paternity coaching may explore this perceived conflict and meaning making in the new role (Liston-Smith, 2011; Habib, 2012; Simpson and Rhodes, 2019).

Coaching as a discipline is concerned with responding to or facilitating change. With the transition to parenthood, change is anticipated (Moffett, 2018), yet the reality of that change will not be realised until the parent experiences it for the first time. Coaching in anticipation of any change is supported by a strong body of practitioner texts, an additional theoretical reference point for parental coaching is life stage theory, mapping approaches to viewing the different stages of life from childhood through to old age (Erikson, 1959; Levinson, 1978). This theory identifies stages associated with 'love' and 'settling down' with Levinson stating that with each transition stage there are three tasks: Terminate previous stage, increased self-awareness of the new stage and an initiation of the new stage. Schlossberg's (1981) proposes a '4S transition theory' that takes a transition and identifies factors that allow a useful lens to manage change and can be applied to parental transition – Situation, Self, Support and Strategy. Palmer and Panchal (2012) refer to Neugarten and Hagestad's seminal text where they identify transitions as being part of a 'fluid life

cycle', understanding this fluidity in relation to coaching sessions is key to allow for a depth of exploration and reflection.

From a more practical perspective, Cox's (2006) IMPACT model helps guide a coaching conversation focused on a transition. The IMPACT model (Identify life chapters, Make sense of transitions, Plan, Act, Consider, Track) builds on other coaching models in that it pays attention to the life transition inviting reflection by the coachee.

Maternity coaching as a sub discipline of coaching literature is more established than paternity coaching. Given the lack of evidence-based paternity coaching literature it is useful to understand the emergence of maternity coaching; why it exists and the evidence of practice. The increasing numbers of women who start a family in their 30's or 40's means that they have a decade or so of experience before taking maternity leave (Sparrow, 2006; Bussell, 2008). With many women in the workforce initially returning to work after childbirth, parental transition coaching is increasingly provided by HR functions (Bussell, 2008; Hall, 2009; Sullivan, 2015). Cotter (2015) suggests that maternity coaching 'provides a bridge, supporting and guiding women as they experience the transition from working woman to working mother'. So the transition in question is focused on the return to work shift rather than the transition to motherhood. There is a high drop-out point after a year following a return to work (Sparrow, 2006), presenting clear opportunities for the employer as well as the employee to benefit from a smooth transition back to the workplace (Bussell, 2008; Sparrow, 2006, 2008, 2009). Retention rates following the introduction of coaching programmes for women (Parke, 2012; Filsinger and Worth, 2012) demonstrate an efficacy that warrants attention in understanding the impact if undertaken more systematically for fathers. The study does not evaluate efficacy, but explores the themes raised during work-place coaching, and implications informing best-practice coaching programmes design.

Methodology

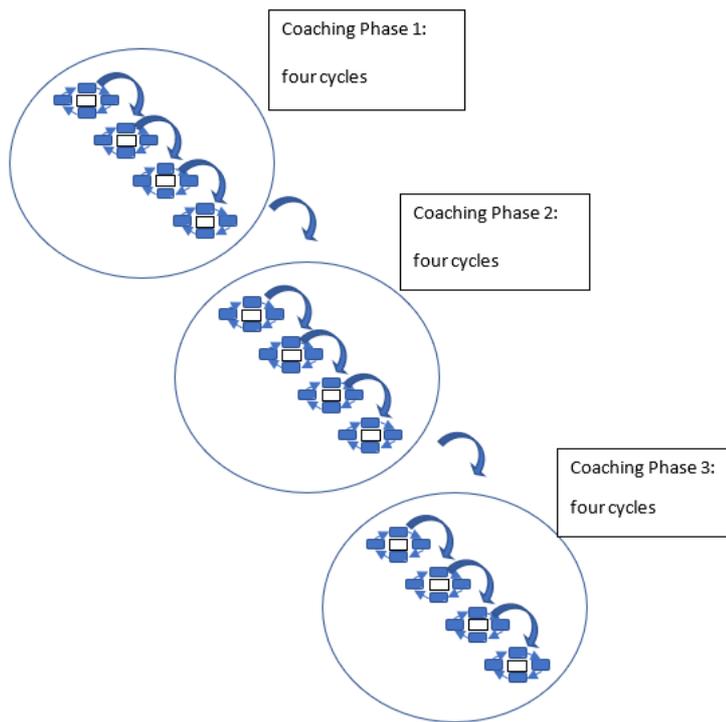
From a critical realist perspective, the researcher is not simply an observer of the coaching, the 'empirical'. This is an understanding the 'actual' and the 'real', the underlying structures of the experience (Bhasker, 2013; Bryman et al., 2013). Participatory Action Research invites the researcher as well as the participants to help codify and shape the journey of the research; it is not research that is 'done' to participants, but actively done 'with' them (Chandler and Torbet, 2003; Chen et al., 2017; Herr and Anderson, 2005). Conducting cycles of action to help deep embedded analysis to help understand the contextual what works well when undertaking research within an organisational environment (Wicks et al., 2008).

The fatherhood transition could be a stressful and unsettling time (Holmes and Rahe, 1967), by using PAR 'researchers should carefully navigate between fostering action and expressing compassion' (Duijs et al., 2019). It is used in the workplace to identify how to improve current practice (Raelin and Coughlan, 2006; Coughlan and Brannick, 2014) with an affinity from a coaching perspective for the notion of an egalitarian approach and partnership (Kimsey-House et al., 2011).

Initially the research was aimed at recent fathers in the UK, HR data showed there were three potential candidates. Two of these were first time fathers, one left the company, leaving one first-time father and one second-time father. Data recording employees who become fathers is not recorded consistently on a global basis, so to widen the potential participant pool an all-company memo on the intranet was posted inviting fathers with a baby under 12 months to participate. This provided a cohort of four father: two in the UK, one in the US and one in Germany. To anonymise the data for analysis, I used a code P1, P2, P3 and P4. This was then translated that into pseudonyms – Brad, Tom, Ralf and Phil for the research findings. Each phase of research contained four cycles of activity (one per participant), totalling 12 cycles in all. Each coaching

session and interview were concluded in a sequence to provide the most analysis and input possible:

Figure 1: Twelve cycles of Participatory Action Research



Semi-structured interviews were recorded and used as the main data collection point for the reflect and review session (Creswell, 2013, Bryman, 2016). Each interview in phase one followed the same questions, the transcribed interviews were the main data sources for the research. The coaching sessions were not recorded, but session notes were utilised for reflective practice and to enrich the findings.

For subsequent interviews the questions changed based on the experience of the prior phase, there were three sets of questions in total. By keeping one set of questions per phase, minimised the potential of leading questions from one participant to the next (Wengraf, 2001). The Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase guide to thematic analysis was used allowing analysis of the data from each interview as well as then looking at each phase in turn to identify and organise patterns through the analysis.

Findings and discussion

Table I: Themes arising from the research

<i>Responsibility and purpose</i>	<i>Self-Care</i>	<i>Adaptation to the New Role</i>
Career	Time	Connection
Money	Health	Perception
Role modelling	Psychological support	Flexibility
	Balance	

The analysis identified similarities in the experience of fatherhood transition by the participants which fell in to three overarching areas, each with sub-components adding nuance to the

understanding of how these themes manifest within the experience. Table I details the themes and sub-themes identified.

Responsibility and Purpose

All participants stated explicitly that they felt a greater sense of responsibility and purpose since the arrival of children; I found that this was implicit throughout the coaching interviews. Through analysis I found the sub-themes of Career, Money and Role-modelling that appeared integral to their sense of responsibility and purpose.

The interviews showed the participants reflecting on the sense of purpose and responsibility 'I'm part of [my team], I'm part of [the company] but at the end of the day my number one responsibility is to me and my children and my family and I think that helps, our session helps remind me of that' (Brad).

Participants reported a greater sense of being responsible with regards to planning which speaks to the 'Strategy' part of Schlossberg's transition theory. This touched on planning related to their career, financial and also routine planning around day-to-day issues combining family and work demands. This theme came out strongly during the coaching sessions as well as the interviews after each coaching session. Career advancement was discussed explicitly by all participants and linked to the sense of responsibility, money, family routine and self-esteem.

Money was a strong underpinning of the theme with participants identifying the demands on their money that related to childcare costs and other life events (moving to a new, bigger house etc). Three out of the four fathers had wives were still on maternity leave, this significantly impacted household finances, and the pressure on the main breadwinner. There were two key aspects relating to the financial conversation; the downstream consequences (bigger car, moving house etc.) the other was direct-child costs (equipment, childcare etc).

The consequences of having a family translates into other stressful life events such as moving house. Two of the four participants had moved to a new house in the last three months, and both talked about this as adding financial pressure, particularly given their wives were still at home and not planning to go back to work full time. With the added lack of focus on driving a career path towards promotion this additional financial pressure presented anxiety for one in particular.

The increased costs of starting a family are not limited to material costs such as nappies, equipment and clothing. The participants with two children talked about the impact of childcare costs on the family finances. With all the participants' children being under school age, this was reckoned to be a highly expensive period of time. 'I've just got to hold on to September when [my child] starts school and I don't have the nursery fees anymore' (Brad) 'I know we are getting a bonus this year, it will need to be a good one, this is the most skint I've ever been' (Phil). The time in coaching spent talking about this was in session two for the 2-child participants. The explorations in coaching for participants focused on the recognition that this was potentially a short-term issue, looking at the next few months and what changes needed to happen to get to the point where childcare fees were more manageable

Role modelling came through as a reflection in both the coaching itself and the interviews afterwards, with participants discussing balancing being the best version of themselves on little sleep. 'Since having [my child] I feel like things are different, I am different, work is just work, it is there so I can provide for my family. It doesn't mean I care less about work, just that it puts it all into perspective' (Brad).

Miller also identifies and explores these themes in her work relating to fatherhood transition (2011a, 2011b, 2017) and it is supported by other literature (Belsky and Kelly, 1994; Fägerskiöld, 2008;

Nash, 2018a, 2018b). This sense that there was a family relying on the participants now seemed to motivate them at work. They all contrasted this to their pre-children life and how their perspective had changed: Brad talked about how he used to do the 'bare minimum at times to get through school, college and work', but now he felt that 'was not appropriate now [I] have a family depending on me'. Tom said this has been playing on his mind '[my wife] has taken a massive cut in what she earned and she's feeling some ways dependent on me and I am trying to take that fear away from her'. Although this shift may have been acknowledged, understanding the experience during coaching allowed the participants to sense-make this part of the transition. Encouraging that reflection by the coach rather than simply identifying solutions to coping in the new normal, seems to be an important part of this transition.

Self-Care

The theme of Self-Care looking at 'me' time and split in to four key areas: Time, Health, Psychological Support and Balance. When reviewing the stresses pertaining to parents (Brotherson, 2004) 'Loss of free time for self and social activities' is listed under the stresses for fathers, but not mothers.

The theme of Self-Care came out strongly and consistently from all participants through the coaching conversations, the interviews and through the wheel of life tool where used. There was an acknowledgement regarding the de-prioritisation of their own hobbies and leisure, yet a recognition that this was normal for the stage of transition they were in.

Reflection on the way time was spent was evident across all participants. When asked what the one thing they would like to change it was 'time for myself' followed by 'time as a couple' for 3 out of the 4 participants. The participants were all going to 'work' during the day, and that left the evening for family time, household chores, work (from the daytime) and relaxing. The way they spent time at the weekend also shifted compared to pre-children, with conflicting priorities; spending time with their family, friends and time for themselves. The shift to new friends and support networks through having the children was prevalent 'I hang out with the guys on my block now drinking a beer in the yard, because it's kinda easier, that's only really happened since having kids, I don't go out drinking with my old friends in the same way' (Brad); 'my wife has friends from baby groups and we may meet up with them' (Phil). New networks included parents in the neighbourhood, parent-oriented groups like National Childbirth Trust, parents from daycare - this strongly speaks to the support aspect of Schlossberg (1981).

The sub-theme of health encompasses both the physical and mental health. In the analysis it came out as a subcategory of self, but there is a strong link between health and finding the time to be active, and to think.

There was a recognition that de-prioritisation of self was not good for physical or mental health. The participants all took part in some form of physical activity and linked this closely to finding time for themselves.

Having children had prompted the participants to consider their longevity 'I want to be around to see them grow up' (Brad) and a sense of responsibility to their families to stay healthy 'I think am I making the right healthy choices, not just healthy but also sensible and the right thing for my family and my child' (Tom).

The impact of childhood illnesses on the participants' routines meant they needed to take time off work to care for their children where their wives were either working or also ill. The reality of having children has meant that with the exception of Tom, the participants noted the increase of illness in themselves, where the children had been ill and subsequently so had they. Brad noted 'the healthier I can be the less likely I am going to pick up the bugs and so forth that the kids will

inevitably get'. Those with more than one child observed that 'as soon as [the baby] goes to daycare you just know you they will get sick from all the bugs being passed around' (Ralf).

The psychological support that coaching offered was built on the level of trust and rapport developed; the coaching sessions provided a safe space. It was mentioned that some of the issues explored could not be discussed openly at home, they did not want to burden their wives with some of the issues. The exploration of the concept of support networks (Schlossberg, 1981) allowed the participants to examine their networks of psychological support and identifying where they could strengthen or pay attention to existing networks.

The aspect of balance came under Self-Care with the participants recognising that this phase in their family's life was a transition; it was a phase, keeping perspective was important and required self-compassion.

The links to Schlossberg's 4S theory (1981) were strong when it came to Self-Care, consideration of the self, of support and strategies underpin this theme. A mother's free time and social activities are intrinsically linked to activities with the baby, where new social circles and routines are being formed (Miller,2007). In contrast a father's routine when considered holistically has altered in the 'home space' yet the workspace remains similar to pre-baby, the sense of loss relating to free time may be felt more acutely for fathers, whereas mothers have adapted their routines and habits to accommodate socialising with the baby.

The time spent in coaching gave the participants permission to focus on themselves, over the course of the research it was 3 hours that they would not have carved out elsewhere "It's certainly time to sort of sit down and actually think about life and career in a way that I certainly wouldn't have done without it' (Phil).

Adapting to the New Role

The theme of adapting to the new role came up in the coaching sessions and was explicitly explored in the interviews. There are three sub themes that make up this area; Connection, Perception and Demands of the new role.

The idea that an individual has a multiplicity of roles is not new (Bachkirova, 2011). Understanding how the father experiences this new role provides a useful lens for the coach. The participants had more than one role 'Work Phil' 'Father Phil' 'Son Phil' 'Friend Phil' etc. Even as this new mini father self evolves it may split further into subsets; playmate, caretaker, the disciplinarian (Jain et al. 1996), the way these aspects of a role present themselves is multifactorial influenced by the needs of others and the context (Habib, 2012). Being identified in the new role of 'father' in the work context was raised in coaching, suddenly belonging to a new collective identity in the workplace (Tracy & Thethewey, 2005). The analysis highlighted how the fathers adapted to this new role.

With existing colleagues, the transition to fatherhood, whether for the first or subsequent times, presented a new topic of conversation and sense of connectedness. Tom particularly expressed this in the interviews 'I was so, like private, I share information but I'm not very social in that sense. So all of a sudden it gave people, they looked at me...gave them a completely new perspective'. Tom went further to say that he felt fatherhood 'humanised him' in the eyes of others.

The way they are perceived in the workplace since having children was a subtheme that I was not expecting, this is linked to responsibility but also more holistically to their behaviours and expectations. This may play into the societal expectations that having children and proving virility, equals success and respect (Gillies, 2009). Phil proudly displays photos of his children on his desk, inviting a conversation with his peers about the kids. Tom and Ralf have brought their children to

the workplace, for Ralf the nursery is next door. These are very visible signals of the additional role they have assumed.

There were practicalities discussed around the additional role of father in the work context, the level of flexibility offered here was key in enabling the fathers to blend their family and work commitments. They broadly fell in two areas: expectations around work travel, and, working patterns and hours.

Phil discussed declining work travel because of time spent away from the family as well as the guilt felt when he did go on necessary travel 'It's conference season so there's lots of travel'. This was a change from pre-children where he would 'not think twice about the travel'.

Ralf appreciated the flexibility in work patterns afforded to him to manage childcare arrangements more equitably. He had requested a change in working pattern down to 70% in order to share childcare responsibilities. He reflected heavily about how this might impact his promotion opportunities, he felt that although he worked really hard it was still unusual for a father to reduce the hours 'there is a conflict, I feel like my career won't progress as quickly as if I was at 100%, but I don't want to change it, I value the time with my family too much'. The literature on maternity returners shows this conflict is similarly felt by women returning to work. Career prospects for part-time workers remains an area that women find hard to reconcile, and organisations rarely provide the infrastructure to support (Bussell, 2008; Sparrow, 2006, 2008, 2009).

Flexibility seems key to managing the demands of multiple roles, Phil said that the ability to work from home (from a policy and practical perspective) 'really made a difference, particularly when sleep is in short supply'.

The additional and different demands on them during the transition changed them in ways they expressed around routine, practical aspects, and emotional capability. The emergence of a new 'mini-self' (Bachkirova, 2011) was perhaps evident in the way the participants described how their role(s) were impacted and evolving. The differing demands they now faced, and the reconciliation with their 'new self' and 'old self' rather than the evolution of the self was expressed in coaching in terms of how they connect with others and how they feel they are now perceived.

Adapting to the new role within the organisational setting combines a practical and psychological aspect, the experience of the participants shows a blending of how the fathers experience their new role. Through coaching the reconciliation of this new role of 'father' can be explored in a safe space, helping to make sense of the transition.

Implications for coaching

One of the implications for coaching was whether the issues explored could have been addressed via other methods. A robust career management and personal development programme, although often explored in coaching, could provide more certainty during stressful transitions. When designing a coaching programme this can be an area explored with the organisation so there is an efficiency in signposting between programmes, or clear boundaries for support identified.

Expansion on maternity-coaching programmes

Where organisations already offer coaching for those returning to work from maternity leave, consideration might also be given to expanding this to include fathers. This provides an equitability of support, albeit focusing on different aspect. The research provided an opportunity for the four fathers to have these conversations that they were not having elsewhere. A structured parent transition coaching programme would provide this benefit for a large cohort of colleagues.

Use of in-house coaches

The research design considerations meant that I was the coach for the research within my own organisations. The benefit of this is the level of trust I could establish quickly and understanding I had of the company, I could help with the sense-making process as they identified action they might want to take. However this depth of organisational understanding could be detrimental to the coaching process as I am not providing an objective perspective which I was conscious of this as I was coaching. Organisations who use in-house coaches will build a team of people who help create an environment where the issues brought to coaching are part of the culture of the organisation.

Format of coaching

The research used a 1-2-1 format, a consideration for organisations would be to establish a programme that blends 1-2-1 and group coaching to create a cohort effect of peer-to-peer support whilst also respecting the need for focused time.

There are several aspects for the coaching profession to consider:

Experience of parenthood

Unlike with maternity coaching, where gender of the coach is important, with paternity coaching the parental experience of the coach is helpful whilst coaching through transition to parenthood in order to fully empathise. A coach may need to consider that this may be the only forum for a father to express some of these thoughts and emotions, so at times it may feel overwhelming for both the coach and participant. An opportunity exists for coaches to signpost either to other more formal support networks but allowing the coachee to identify the support networks they have and signpost to them.

Coaching Supervisors

Coaching supervisors who are supporting coaches who may not be parents may find the way the themes and subthemes presented themselves in the research relevant to help guide and explore to attain a more reflexive practice.

Coaching format and delivery

The research focused on a 1-2-1 format; however I believe that this demographic would benefit from the availability of group coaching particularly within a work context where the exploration of context-specific career-oriented conversations could be beneficial. Semi-formal group coaching as opposed to friends going to the pub, could be part of a programme to support newly transitioning father (Miller and Nash, 2017). Mothers are encouraged to get this benefit at baby and toddler groups as part of their new routines following birth. This would be supported by Schlossberg's 4S theory of ensuring support networks are in place.

The research I conducted was primarily via Skype, I believe that the 1-2-1 coaching therefore could be done remotely. The technology did not hinder the conversations where responsibility was at the core, I was able to see the participants' faces and watch for visual clues where they were thinking, allowing them to express their thoughts.

Conclusions

Despite a prediction in the rise of organisations looking to provide paternity coaching (van Nieuwerburgh, 2015), there is a paucity of coaching literature focused on the role of the father in the organisation; this study is closing that gap. The research is contributing to the absence of

transition coaching (Bachkirova et al. 2016) through the lens of fatherhood. The challenge is a wealth of practitioners operating in response to an articulated need for coaching, but without the evidence base to support its efficacy.

The implications for coaching focusing on how a coachee transitions to this new role presents an opportunity to explore the self, support and strategies relating to fundamental elements of a successful transition. Through the analysis there were three broad themes, each with a number of subthemes:

Responsibility and Purpose

The subthemes of career, money and role-modelling with the participants experiencing a heightened sense of responsibility linking career and money whilst being a role model to their children. There are opportunities for organisations to provide, and signpost, to other interventions such as ongoing career conversations and development opportunities that may address the concerns in this subtheme.

Self-Care

The analysis showed strong interlinking but separate subthemes of Time, Health, Psychological Support and Balance. The themes examined the importance of decisions relating to 'me-time' and taking care of the self. The coaching sessions may be the only space participants had to explore areas of anxiety and stress relating to parenthood. This is vital in the early phases of any transition, particularly one that ranks highly as a stress factor; coaching whether it is 1-2-1 or group may contribute to a smoother transition.

Adapting to the New Role

In terms of adapting to the new role the participants explored the sense of connectedness as well as how they were now perceived and any practical decisions the participants had to make. The opportunity for the fathers to increase their connections as a result of their new role identity expands their support network and encourages a smoother transition. The coaching affirmed the need to identify these and acknowledge them. The self-perception of the fathers in the workplace shifts as they transition, adapting to this and making adjustments to how they now operate as fathers is useful to explore in coaching.

Coaching programmes might take in to account the practical (duration/timing/delivery/format/tools/coach) as well as the organisational context and the recognition that the coaching needs to be coachee-led, that the experiences and ability to cope will differ from coachee to coachee. An explicit acknowledgement that coaching time is time for the individual, and it may be the only time they feel like they are getting that time. This could be very powerful in helping to shift behaviours and thinking. Identifying other ways in which some element of (reframed) 'me' time can be gained would be a positive outcome of coaching in supporting transitioning fathers.

There are broader societal expectations about how a father 'should' behave and organisations can help shape some of this through policy. Coaching programmes designed to support parenthood may help normalise a shift in behaviours towards a more balanced and equal participation in balancing childcare and careers and the multiple roles we require people balance.

The research was limited to four individuals within a single organisational context in the publishing industry potentially limiting the applicability of the findings to other industries. However, this does mean that the findings are more relevant for the wider publishing sector.

The research is potentially underpinned by unconscious positive bias – the organisation had a parenthood policy in place, all volunteers had a positive view of coaching when they embarked on

the research.

Areas for further research

The findings of the study suggest further areas for research.

- the transition to parenthood for those who were not expecting/welcoming the pregnancy,
- the experience of single parents,
- the transition to parenthood through adoption.

Future research concerning the format for coaching those transitioning to fatherhood would provide additional insight for organisations, coaches and coach practitioners. Providing the evidence of the benefits of 1-2-1, group and blended coaching approaches would help in the design of future coaching programmes and support interventions.

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