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BMPF7008: Work-based Learning Project

An investigation into leadership styles and the effectiveness of praise and criticism in a choral setting

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PROJECT PROPOSAL

1. Project Title

An investigation into leadership styles and the effectiveness of praise and criticism in a choral setting.

2. The context

Choral conducting concerns more than the art of gesturing: it is a role that comprises several functions including the mobilisation of singers (Jansson, 2019, p. 870). This project will focus on the relationship between choral conductors and adult amateur choral singers. It aims to explore the factors that contribute to an effective leadership style including the communication of praise and criticism in a way that positively influences confidence, attitude and achievement of choir members. I have been an amateur choral singer for 35 years and have conducted three adult amateur choirs and a children's choir.

3. The justification

Jansson suggests that there is limited research on “the impact view” of choral conducting, that is from the point of view of the singer (2019, p. 866). Therefore this project aims to provide singers' insights on choral leadership.

Bonshor (2017) previously investigated the use of praise and criticism in a choral setting with a sample size of 34. He stated that more research was needed on the receipt of group feedback, so that it successfully targets the correct people. This project looks to continue this research.

4. The intended impact

- To identify characteristics that contribute to an effective leadership style for a choral conductor.
- To understand what impact praise and criticism has on the confidence, attitude and achievement of choir members.
- To identify methods to enhance and more accurately deliver feedback in a choral setting.
- The findings from this study could be rolled out to help other choral leaders.

5. The outlined intention

This project is a qualitative study (Denscombe, 2003, p. 267) focusing on choral leaders and adult amateur choir members. I will undertake a literature review (Walliman, 2020, p. 148) on choral leadership and the use of praise and criticism in choirs. I will conduct semi-structured interviews (Denscombe, 2003, p. 103) on Zoom with eight choral conductors, which I will recruit through personal contacts, from the end of October to early November 2021. The interviews will be recorded using my Mac and the software Otter.ai and then transcribed and sent to the participants for validation. In addition, observations of non-verbal communication will also be recorded in order to aid interpretation of the text (Gill, 2008, p. 293).

I will provide an online questionnaire for adult amateur singers. I will use my network of contacts and social media to initially find participants. I will then use snowball sampling (Denscombe, 2003, p. 16) to enlist further participants. I will carry out follow-up interviews with eight of the choir members who responded to the questionnaire in order to gain further depth of knowledge and clarity. Purposive sampling (Denscombe, 2003, p. 15) will be used in order to ensure that these interviewees have a wide experience of choral conductors. These will take place over Zoom from the middle to the end of November 2021. As before these interviews will be recorded, transcribed and validated by the participants. I will also record observations of non-verbal communication.

The data will be analysed and compiled into a written report for submission and presentation in January 2022.

6. The ethics and insider research

I will inform all participants, in advance, of the data that I am looking to gather, what is expected of them, their time commitment and what will happen with the information that I collect. I will get a signed consent form from interview candidates. Questionnaire participants will be provided with the same information on the first page and will be informed that by clicking the 'Next' button that they are providing consent.

Anonymity is a high priority, as it could lead to reputational risk for the conductor, singers, choir, the University or for myself as a researcher. To ensure confidentiality, all participants will be assigned a unique identifier. A list of these identifiers as well as the research data will be kept securely in password-protected Google cloud storage.

In terms of being an insider researcher, I believe that this will be limited. Members of choirs that I have previously conducted may respond as a result of snowball sampling, but they are under no pressure to complete the questionnaire or to tailor their answers in line with what they think I would want to read (Costley, Elliott & Gibbs, 2010, p. 31).

7. Personal learning outcomes

I would like to be able to use the conclusions from this project to assist me in developing an appropriate leadership style. In addition, I would like to use the findings to help me tailor my approach in the delivery of positive and negative feedback, so that it enhances my choir members' learning experiences and confidence.

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PROJECT REPORT

Introduction

This study will investigate the leadership characteristics of choral conductors working with adult amateur singers in the UK. The project plans to give voice to the singer, as little research has been carried out from this perspective (Jansson, 2019, p. 866), and hopes to provide insight to the elements that contribute to a singer's self-efficacy and sense of achievement. In addition to understanding the key competencies that a choral leader needs to have, this research will also explore a conductor's use of positive and negative feedback and its impact on singers. In particular, it looks to continue Bonshor's research on choral praise and criticism (2017) bringing attention to targeted feedback, that is exploring how singers in a group setting know if feedback is relevant to them or not.

I have been an amateur choral singer for 35 years and have sung for approximately 30 conductors. I currently sing in a symphonic chorus and I have just started running a new adult amateur choir, having previously run a community choir, a female chamber choir and a children's choir. I would like the choir to strive for high standards, whilst being an enjoyable and inspirational experience for all. I would like to understand what the singers need from me in order to achieve that and build their confidence. Therefore the aims of this project are:

- To recognise the traits and competencies that underpin successful relationships between choral conductors and singers
- To appreciate the consequences that positive and negative feedback have on the self-efficacy, attitude and achievements of adult amateur choral singers.
- To explore strategies to improve the communication to get the best out of choir members and to more precisely target the correct singers.

Finally, I hope to be able to help other choral leaders by sharing the findings of this study.

Literature Review

This section will provide a summary of the literature relating to choral conducting competencies with a particular focus on adult amateur singers. In addition, it will also outline the literature surrounding the use of praise and criticism in a choral setting.

Swan states that “It takes a very great person, a Very Great Person (and notice that I don’t say a very great musician), it takes a very great person to be an inspiring conductor” (1987, cited in Allen & Apfelstadt, 1990, p. 25). This distinction between a person and a musician suggests that there is more to a being an effective choral conductor than music alone. Indeed, Jansson, Elstad and Døving begin their research article by describing choral conducting as “a complex and multi-faceted leader role.” (2021, p. 3)

Choral Conductor Model

Jansson, Elstad and Døving (2021) explored the importance of 17 competencies with choral conductors in three categories using a slightly adapted Durrant model (2018):

1. Musical-technical: Repertoire knowledge, score proficiency, error detection/aural skills, gestural skills, vocal technique, language skills and choir acoustics.
2. Situational-relational: Rehearsal organisation, rehearsal interventions, mentorship, control/empowerment and staging/spacing.
3. Conductor’s existential foundation: presence, sincerity, devotion, aesthetic will and authority.

Both models are more than a list of leader-centric traits; some consideration has also been given to the conductor’s relationship with the singers, particularly in Durrant’s model: “the conductor should know what makes people tick: what makes them learn, what motivates and sustains them.” (Durrant, p. e4) The effectiveness of a conductor who understands their singers is corroborated by McCoy, who states that “A more productive and congenial rehearsal climate is maintained when the conductor regards singers...as human beings with musical, physical and emotional needs, strengths and limitations.” (1994, p. 21) Jansson indicates that there is a limited amount of research on the impact of choral leadership from the point of view of the singer (2019, p. 866). In Bonshor’s study on confidence which was from the viewpoint of the choral singer, but perhaps slightly less focused on choral leadership, he stated that there was a “relative under-representation of adult amateur choral singers in previous studies”. (2020, p. 41)

Adult amateur singers vary in their music education, choral experience, reasons for singing and in the types of organisations that they join (Bonshor, 2017, p. 40). As Durrant states “What conductors do that makes them successful at conducting in one context, may not be valid and appropriate in another.” (2018, p. e73) Inspired by Goodstein’s study on the leadership of band directors (1984) using Situational Leadership Theory (SLT), Allen (1988) explored this model with relation to choral conducting in different contexts. SLT is based on the idea that there is not a best leadership style and that a style needs to be applied according to the situation. There are four SLT styles: each comprising a different blend of task and relationship behaviour. In Allen’s study of 122 conductors of successful high school and college choirs, 72% used the selling style in a non-music related test. This style is defined as high task/high relationship, which means that they get the job done efficiently, but they value people at the same time. Had they used the telling style, high task/low relationship, their style would have been purely about achieving the goal with little consideration for the people involved. Allen also tested how well the choral leaders could adapt to using a different style for a different situation and this test showed them to be less able to do that. (Allen & Apfelstadt, 1990)

Use of feedback

Hart states that “a learner can improve...only when the learner has some way of knowing what has been executed well and gets feedback at once.” (1983, p. 155) Feedback can be categorised broadly as “positive or negative, specific or general, evaluative or descriptive, verbal or nonverbal, and directed at either the individual or a group” (Biddlecombe, 2012, p. 3).

In terms of balancing criticism and praise, there is a suggestion of an optimum approval/disapproval ratio of 4:1 in classroom settings (Murray, 1975, cited in Biddlecombe, 2012, p. 3). The ‘praise’ sandwich is a seemingly popular technique designed to make negative feedback more palatable by surrounding it on either side with praise. However, there does not appear to be enough evidence to show that it is either effective or ineffective (Henley & DiGennaro Reed, 2015). Critics suggest that the praise could be regarded as insincere or that the recipient of the feedback misses the point which needs correcting (James, 2015).

Biddlecombe (2012) refers to the need for accounting for the impact of the use of specificity as well as the magnitude of the feedback. Biddlecombe indicated that choral conductors use a higher proportion of specificity in their criticism, rather than in their praise. Biddlecombe states that non-specific praise is the “default affirmation used by choral conductors in rehearsals” (2012, p. 14). Furthermore, when non-specific praise is abundant or habitual (as in using ‘good’ as a filler comment), it decreases in value (Bennett, 1989). The study also

suggested that specific praise leads to better retention and in addition the importance of communicating one idea at a time.

Bonshor's research (2017) showed that singers associated positive feedback with an increase in confidence and that it was most effective if the source was "trustworthy and credible" (p. 144). Some participants expressed that respect for the person giving feedback was more important than liking them. Bonshor also showed that constructive criticism contributed positively to confidence levels, if it was relevant and communicated in a respectful way.

There was concern raised in Bonshor's study (2017) that singling out choir members for negative feedback undermined confidence and had a destructive impact on the choir at large. It was also suggested that further study is needed in terms of how to better target feedback at the relevant singers in an effective, but constructive way. I intend to research this matter as part of my project.

As Bonshor remarks it "places a great responsibility on the conductor, as both negative and positive feedback are taken very seriously by amateur singers." (2017, p. 145) This sentiment is corroborated by Durrant: "Conductors...have the capacity to damage people physically, psychologically and emotionally." (2018, p. 6).

Methods

The paradigm that informs this qualitative study is social constructivism comprising an ontological position believing in multiple realities, an epistemology that is transactional and subjective and an axiology where values are at the core (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114). Qualitative data is collected through the observation of people and their experiences and it can be described as “the product of a process of interpretation” (Denscombe, 2003, p. 268). This type of study utilises an inductive, bottom-up approach.

For this project I used phenomenology (Denscombe, 2003, p. 96) to investigate the lived experience of choral conductors and their adult amateur choir members in order to answer the following questions:

- What characteristics contribute to an effective leadership style in a choral setting when working with adult amateur singers?
- What is the impact of praise and criticism on confidence, attitude and achievement in the opinion of choir members and choir leaders?
- How can we target feedback more effectively at the correct singers within a choir?

As phenomenology looks to understand the essence of a lived experience and to present data in a way that is ‘faithful to the original’ (Denscombe, 2003, p. 98), it is essential for the researcher “to be explicit about their own ways of making sense of the world and ... suspend (or bracket off) their own beliefs temporarily for the purposes of research” (Denscombe, 2003, p. 102). Through journaling, I have identified relevant biases and have summarised them below:

I have sung for approximately 30 choral conductors as an amateur singer over 35 years and have experienced both high and low levels of confidence as a result of working with specific people. My definition of “praise” is giving approval for a job well done and I see “criticism” not necessarily as disapproval, but as a judgement that something needs to be worked on. I am quite resilient and unemotional as a recipient of choir-wide criticism. I always mark feedback in my score to create awareness of potential effort needed, even if I think that I did not do anything wrong. I believe that is my responsibility to the team to not overcorrect, but to be informed. However, as an unpaid

choral singer, I would not necessarily want to receive individual feedback or feedback in a small group in front of the whole choir. I would feel differently if I was singing professionally. In addition, outside of choirs, I have worked in a challenging, fast-paced environment for 20 years where there is no praise, you have to do that for yourself. As a conductor, I am very driven, I care a great deal about my singers and I want them to achieve the best for themselves, but I do worry that I cross the line and put them under excessive pressure.

Participants

In total, 89 participants took part in this study: 82 UK amateur adult choral singers responded to a questionnaire and seven UK choral conductors participated in individual interviews. I had intended to also interview eight choral singers, but the questionnaire data turned out to be sufficiently rich and so this was not necessary.

I wanted, in particular, to understand the singers' perspective for this study. Following an initial post on Facebook asking for adult amateur singers to complete an online questionnaire, the singers were then snowball sampled (Denscombe, 2003, p. 16) as the post was shared with others. In total, 82 singers consented to complete the questionnaire, having first read the participant information. The method of online questionnaire was chosen in order to be wide-reaching and to achieve a broad demographic.

The demographic profile was wide-ranging in age (figure 1) and choral experience (figure 2): 59 of the singers had more than 15 years' experience of choral singing; 81 participants had worked with more than one conductor including 7 singers who had worked with over 20 conductors. There was a broad range of choir genres covered with 33 participants singing in multiple types of choir. Symphonic choruses, choral societies, chamber choirs and community choirs were most highly represented, but other types included church, workplace, barbershop, female voice, gospel and a cappella choirs. This depth of experience was helpful in contributing to rich data.

Figure 1, Ages of questionnaire participants (singers)

Ages	No. of participants
18-24	1
25-34	6
35-44	9
45-54	18
55-64	25
65-74	20
75-84	3
85+	0

Figure 2, Choral singing experience of questionnaire participants (singers)

Experience	No. of participants
Less than 5 years	6
5 to 15 years	17
16 to 30 years	20
31 to 40 years	15
41 to 50 years	15
Over 50 years	9

The questionnaire consisted of 27 questions which took singers approximately 20 minutes to complete. There was a focus on open-ended questions to collect qualitative data. Singers were anonymised using a unique identifier beginning with the letter S and by the removal of any references to choirs or other people within the data.

In addition to the singers, seven conductors were interviewed (figure 3). I wanted to include choral conductors to bring richer context and triangulation (Easterby-Smith, 2021, p. 80). The choral conductors were selected mainly using purposive sampling in order to select people of appropriate experience and to cover a broad range of choir types. This enabled the collected data to be more meaningful. All the conductors had over 10 years of experience. Two of the conductors were personal contacts, four were found by searching on the internet and one conductor was recommended by conductor C3. In order to protect their identities, each conductor was given a unique reference starting with the letter C.

Figure 3, Interview participants (conductors)

Participant	Amateur choir type(s)	Choral conducting experience
C1	Community choir	15 years
C2	Barbershop - female only, male only	11 years
C3	Community choir	13 years
C4	Cathedral choir, choral society	24 years
C5	Church choir, community/chamber choir	20 years
C6	Community choir	13 years
C7	Symphonic chorus, choral society	20 years

I utilised semi-structured interviews: one of the primary research methods in phenomenology (Denscombe, 2003, p. 103). They allow for the opportunity to have defined questions as well as flexibility within the interview to ask questions spontaneously, if desired. Each interview was carried out on Zoom and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The interview was transcribed noting any non-verbal communication and sent to each participant for verification.

In analysing the data, I made use of three coding methods:

1. Structural coding, which labels data in larger categories usually by a phrase that refers to a specific research question or topic (Saldaña, 2021, p. 130). As there are two main topics in this study, I chose to use leadership characteristics and feedback as my two anchor codes. This categorisation allowed me to easily see which codes were relevant to which question. This worked particularly well for the conductor interviews.
2. Descriptive coding, which works in a similar way to hashtags in social media by summarising “in a word or short phrase ... the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data.” (Saldaña, 2021) I used this as it felt accessible for a beginner researcher and it seemed appropriate for my interviews and questionnaires. I used this in combination with the anchor code, for example, *Feedback: Actionable advice*.
3. *In Vivo* coding, which uses “a word or a short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 137). I usually this specifically for one question: 16b in the questionnaire – this was a question about the use of negative feedback and I wanted to get a sense of the singer’s voice in this potentially sensitive area without my interpretation adding to it.

As I completed coding of an interview or a question in the questionnaire, I would then collate all my codes and tally them. I would frequently revisit previous interviews and questions to re-code and consolidate. In addition, I recorded notes in a journal as I coded and I used conditional formatting in Excel to understand the most dominant and less frequent codes in each question, in each topic, in each participant set and overall for the study. This helped to understand the themes of the research.

Ethics and Risk

Before carrying out the research, I informed all participants of the information that I was looking to collect, what would be expected of them, how much time it would take and what would happen with the data that I gathered. I received a signed consent form from each of the conductors. The singers provided informed consent within the online questionnaire by clicking the ‘Next’ button at the bottom of the participant information.

A high priority was to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, as disclosure of this information could lead to reputational damage for them, their choir, the University or for me as a researcher. All participants were assigned a unique reference. In fact, the questionnaires could be completed anonymously, so I only had names of certain singers. All identity information was stored in password-protected Google cloud storage. Additionally names of choirs and people within the data were redacted.

With regards to insider researcher considerations, I know two of the conductors that I interviewed, but I do not currently work with them and I do not have regular contact with them. In terms of the singers, I am aware that through snowballing that some people that I currently sing with responded to the questionnaire. I am aware of the potential damage that could be caused by revealing data, even anonymously, within the organisation. I have not discussed the findings with anyone, but in the future I might discuss the overall project in general terms if asked, but I would keep it at a very high level. In addition I believe that at least one member of a choir that I used to run completed the questionnaire. I deliberately did not approach previous choir members because I did not want them to feel any pressure to take part (Costley, Elliott & Gibbs, 2010, p. 31).

Findings

Two key themes arose from the data. The first theme, **leadership is driving culture**, refers to the collective power of a shared mindset and the conductor's lynchpin role in influencing and being a part of this. The second theme, **leadership is finding balance**, refers to the importance of managing the choir through the highs and the lows in whatever form that takes.

One of the main aims of this study was to understand the choral conducting role from the perspective of the singer. In the questionnaire, singers were asked to rate how important they thought 17 choral conducting competencies were from 1 (less important) to 5 (indispensable). These competencies had previously been investigated from the perspective of choral conductors in the study by Jansson, Elstad and Døving (2021).

It is important to say that this is not a quantitative study and the responses to this question were not corrected for bias. This question was purely included to encourage the participants when answering the qualitative questions to think about choral leadership in its broadest terms, rather than just conducting.

Figure 4 lists how many participants rated each competency at each level. The green shading shows which was the most popular score for each competency and the red shading shows the least popular choice of rating.

Figure 4, Choral conducting competencies rated by singers

	Repertoire overview and knowledge of music styles/genres	Score overview and score understanding	Error detection/aural skills	Gestural skills	Vocal technique	Language skills	Choir acoustics (how tones are shaped and voices sound)	Organise and manage the rehearsing process	Provide an effective learning approach for a given piece of music
5 (indispensable)	30	42	45	31	18	11	29	31	32
4	28	26	29	36	31	28	46	34	34
3	17	11	5	10	18	29	5	11	11
2	3	1	1	3	12	10	0	3	1
1 (less important)	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	2
	Be able to give singers specific feedback and guidance	Know when to stop/correct and when to let the singers self-improve	Place singers and voice groups and stage the choir in the room	Presence and concentration in the face of the ensemble	Face the ensemble with sincerity and honesty	Approach the music and the ensemble with devotion and passion	Have a clear idea of the how the music should sound	Act with authority and self-confidence	
5 (indispensable)	34	32	9	31	40	38	52	36	
4	32	38	39	36	26	34	21	34	
3	8	9	22	13	14	7	7	8	
2	5	1	9	0	0	1	0	2	
1 (less important)	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	

All of the green shading sits in ratings 3 to 5 with the lowest being language skills and all of the red shading (of which many fields are zero) are ratings 2 and 1. Singers seem to have high expectations of their choral conductors with all of these competencies being ranked relatively important. Interestingly, in revisiting the Jansson, Elstad and Døving study (2021),

the results are similarly high ranking with the lowest scoring competency also being language skills with a 3.6.

It appears that there is a basic expectation from singers that the conductors are suitably capable in terms of musical, technical and organisational skills for the type of choir that they are running. Certainly, a number of singers indicated that the level of conductor competence correlates with a singer's receptiveness to feedback:

If they don't know the music, or can't conduct, or give any indication they can hear if something is wrong, I am less likely to listen to them. (S21)

In figure 4, besides the musical, technical and organisational skills, that are rated as 5, are competencies that focus on the conductor's humanity and their relationship with the singers: Sincerity, honesty, devotion, passion, authority and self-confidence. From the qualitative data, there seemed to be a strong sense that a conductor's people-based skills are of vital importance to singers. Reciprocating that, one of the considerations that was mentioned repeatedly by some conductors was the establishment and maintenance of a positive culture.

Leadership is driving culture

The Harvard Business Review states that culture "resides in shared behaviors, values, and assumptions and is most commonly experienced through the norms and expectations of a group" and that "people are effectively hardwired to recognize and respond to it instinctively." (Groysberg, 2018) Establishing a culture has been fundamental to this conductor's two choirs:

We've been trying to build the culture and everyone is there because they want to learn how to be a better singer, learn how to sing really well together and put on the best performance they can ... So any new member that comes into the chorus, they're immediately just enveloped by that culture. (C2)

Building a positive environment is C7's primary consideration:

my number one is simply focus on the fact that it is a positive experience.

An alignment to the objectives of the organisation and an understanding of the people is foundational to building a culture (Groysberg, 2018). The importance of a conductor being the right 'fit' for an organisation was reflected in the testimonies of the singers:

It's always a concern finding someone who suits our way of doing things, any old conductor wouldn't do! (S9)

The choir are your first customers, they pay their fees for a service, the audience are your second customers. Both should be happy with the service the conductor provides (but choir first). (S15)

I've experienced 2 conductors used to working primarily with professional choirs who haven't managed their own expectations of an amateur choir or properly gelled with a community choir. Fit is extremely important (S31)

Some conductors who have worked a lot with boys' chapel choirs find it difficult to adopt the right tone with adults. I've also noticed that conductors who largely work with professional choirs can patronise amateur choirs, or not appreciate that amateur singers are equally serious about music as professional singers. (S47)

Asking too much of amateur singers who sing for joy (S58)

Building a positive conductor-choir relationship

The singers showed a desire for conductors to understand them, to be encouraging, patient and to have a sense of humour, and for there to be mutual respect. Most singers felt that respecting a conductor was more important than liking them (as in Bonshor's study (2017)), although liking them helps and some felt that those two emotions were linked.

By coming from a place where the conductor considers themselves as an equal to the singers (by having a different job to them, not a more important one) and invested in the group as a whole developing and creating something beautiful. (S64)

There must be a good fit between the conductor and the choir, and the respect must go both ways. (S31)

If you like a conductor you also want to work hard for them and that makes you feel proud and valued. (S79)

The relationship is undermined by a conductor being rude, overcritical, showing favouritism which can be "soul destroying" (S45), behaving in a superior manner, having temper tantrums, poor conducting skills and being unprepared.

They need to be friendly and approachable so choristers are comfortable to ask for guidance. Humour is essential to bring the enjoyment of singing out and they need to show their weaknesses so that they are not deemed above all others. (S17)

A rude conductor who ignores or unfairly criticises the choir can make me feel belittled or undervalued. (S51)

Empathy appears to be a driving force in developing or destroying the conductor-amateur adult singer relationship. In this instance, C7 recognises “that people come in from that whatever they've been doing in the day.” However, there is certainly a sense from some singers that their conductors are not so empathetic: “Inability to understand that amateurs have full time jobs and do their best to get to rehearsals on time etc. Is very dispiriting.” (S10)

Sense of humour was one characteristic that many singers desired in their conductors and seemed to have an uplifting impact on choir spirits, as long as the jokes were appropriate and not of a bullying nature:

(S3) A sense of humour and fun to allow mistakes to be made in the early stages of a piece, so as not to demoralise the group or make them feel as though they are not good enough.

(S13) making jokes at one section's expense ("which of the sopranos has the brain this evening")

The impact that a conductor has is not just on the choir as a whole, it can have an impact on individuals, as is the case with these participants:

I left [symphonic chorus] in large part due to the bullying atmosphere cultivated by the conductor, and the inappropriate favouritism with either the younger female members of the choir or with any member who showed willingness to sign up to a committee role. It was not about musical skill or talent but entirely about who would serve the conductor's narcissism and needs. I enjoy being in a symphonic choir but would think carefully before joining another one and would need lots of trials to make sure the regular conductor is a team player and encourages singers on merit and from a place of deep understanding of pieces. (S64)

My confidence in each choir depends almost entirely on the culture established by the conductor. (S25)

You can be passionate, frustrated and despairing but still encourage to improve instead of making me feel I am no good. (S5)

Introducing new singers to the culture

For new members, C2 runs a 4-to-5-week audition process, which includes a trial rehearsal, a one-to-one lesson, singing in a quartet for which they receive feedback before performing it again the following week:

it's more looking for the drive to learn and by auditioning in that way, when we give a new song to the chorus, all of the members because they get into the chorus by having that drive, they've got that drive when it comes to new songs and learning stuff out of rehearsals.

In this way, they protect the culture and in particular, reinforce having a motivated membership that is strongly aligned: "I think the whole kind of philosophy ... is to build a culture that means we can work in a way that's going to be best for everybody. And that everybody buys into that." (C2)

Using the culture to assist with targeted feedback

As mentioned in the literature review, one area for further investigation is the targeting of feedback within a group setting i.e. when a conductor is giving feedback to a group, how they ensure the right singers take action.

The, perhaps, obvious solution to this would be to address individual singers or small sections if the conductor is aware of the source of the problem. It certainly appears to be a contentious issue for the conductors: C3 feels that highlighting individuals would create a "blame culture" and for C7 "it's a lockdown no-no".

In this study, singers appeared more open to the concept, although it did provoke some strong negative reactions too. The data came from an open-ended question asking how singers would feel if they were targeted in this way. As it is not a multiple choice question, this is my interpretation of what the singers said: in terms of isolating individuals, 21 people said no, 23 said yes and 8 said not in front of others. For some singers, it depended on choir size, justification and the conductor-singer relationship. Of course, it is very context-based, so those

numbers might change hugely in an actual situation. People seemed more comfortable with being addressed in a small section, 42 yes, 8 no and 2 not in front of others. From some participants, there was an acknowledgement that sometimes localised feedback is necessary, but could be “more difficult” (S29) or “too uncomfortable” (S62).

If single members are humiliated I am bitterly disappointed and annoyed. (S2)

I have been in situations where my small section has received targeted feedback. It can very uncomfortable, like being labelled the remedial class. (S28)

Very positive as long as it is specific to a section of music and comes with suggestions how to improve tone or techniques (S35)

I think negative feedback to individuals could knock confidence, it could be slightly less overwhelming if it was aimed at a group, but could still dampen enjoyment. (S46)

Sometimes singing row by row can be helpful. However, other times it can be seen as a punishment and is uncomfortable (S82)

It is possible that a smaller choir could make a difference to a singer's receptiveness to individual feedback: “It's the diminishing of the embarrassment factor if it's done in the right way.” (C7)

C2 utilises the culture they have built to achieve targeted feedback effectively. C2 will approach some singers within the group setting:

If there's maybe a person slightly off, I've built a culture I think where I can say “Your tongue tension might be causing something in there that's not quite working with the rest of the section. Okay, let's see if I can deal with it.” If there are people that I know that are more sensitive, I won't do it. I'll wait until a break or wait until I do a one-to-one lesson with them and then fix it then. (C2)

In addition, C5 runs two choirs with 12 to 15 members, where she knows her singers very well and is able to give effective feedback in front of the group to particular singers:

So I know that there would be certain singers that I could, or people that I could, be quite frank with them and say “X, I can hear you're nearly there, but you're just slightly under the pitch. So try doing this instead.

S79 suggests “a strong leadership role within the sections”, which is a method that C4 utilises to help feed back to individual singers. C2 and C7 have established processes, which allow for private individual feedback:

We also have an assessment system ... which is that they have to sing their part off-music recorded at home. And then the section leader checks that they're singing all the right notes and rhythms and words. So again, if there's one person that's just constantly singing the same wrong note, I know that before we go to a performance that's going to be picked up by the assessment system. I might not have to make that exchange in rehearsal as well. (C2)

I've learned that it has to be managed by process. So if you have a regular audition, re-audition, feedback session where you can give honest and constructive and purposeful feedback then that's where you address those situations. (C7)

The solution seems to be to understand your singers and build a culture that allows for the establishment of processes that are well supported by the singers, whether that be feedback within the group, the use of section leaders, an assessment system or one-to-one sessions. Clearly there are different timescales in these options and perhaps a conductor has to accept that not everything can be corrected in the present moment.

C2 works to increase the default vocal skill level of his choir at every rehearsal in their 45 minute warm-up, in addition to flying over a vocal coach from the US at least once a year to work with the choir.

We're only thinking about one thing at a time. So that we can get better at that one thing and then move on to another one thing, so that gradually when we come to then singing and working on the songs, our defaults are better. (C2)

Within their culture, they are embedding a long-term proactive learning approach, which may lead to less of a need to approach people individually in a rehearsal.

Leadership is finding balance

Praise vs. criticism

Nearly all the singers felt that it was important to receive praise from a conductor and there was a sense that it had an impact on their self-efficacy, attitude and achievement. One singer said that it made them “feel known and valued”.

When he would smile and clasp his hands together expressing his appreciation, made me want to do my best. (S24)

All of the conductors recognised the importance of positive feedback:

it is making sure that actually, every time something good is happening it doesn't matter what age we're working with, they like it when they're told that they've done a good job. (C2)

Both singers and conductors found overpraising or insincere praise to be worthless:

If praise is empty it becomes meaningless (S80)

There are times when you do need to do it for morale, perhaps you need to lift them, but you can't do that all the time. And say, you know, because it becomes meaningless and you're not doing them any favours and they won't improve (C5)

Criticism received a mixed response from singers:

Negativity breeds negativity and lack of confidence (S17)

too much criticism is awful and demotivating (S55)

sometimes a jolt is needed (S57)

It depends on the goals of the choir - if they are there purely for fun, negative feedback can affect confidence, but if the choir is there to be 'good' and improve, it is necessary. (S81)

Who cares - if you're wrong, you're wrong - don't sugar coat it. (S65)

Some participants shared memories of negative feedback that had clearly had a lasting impact:

A long time ago, the same conductor yelled at the altos on the afternoon before an evening concert and the result was not good - the altos lost confidence and sounded poor. (S51)

I have a recurrent nightmare about a (very famous) choral conductor because he had a habit of singling people out and making an example of them for keeping their head in their score. (S47)

Most participants desired ways for “criticism” to be constructive, so that it could be better received:

It can be negative and completely factual, but if its [sic] delivered destructively, I'm too busy being hurt or annoyed to take on the feedback. (S3)

The most popular suggestions were the use of specific actionable advice, providing an explanation and demonstration. In addition, correcting through the use of repetition. Many felt that negative feedback should be preceded by praise or in a ‘sandwich’ as in the delivery of positive, negative and then positive feedback. There was a desire from singers for politeness, respect, encouragement, empathy and potentially using humour “to soften the blow” (C1).

In addition, the feedback should “be given without blame” (S67).

I feel like if I'm speaking in a language that is very matter of fact to the chorus, it's much easier for me to give criticism, because it's kind of like, well, “I think actually, we can have a slightly different tongue position on this vowel sound”. It's not saying “You sang that vowel badly”. What can I do to make things better? So always looking at what can we do rather than what we did. (C2)

As mentioned in the literature review, there have been studies that indicate that the ratio of praise to criticism should be 4:1. While this is not a quantitative study and is not corrected for bias, to get an initial sense, the singers were asked what they felt the balance should be between the two types of feedback in percentage terms for an average rehearsal, for example, praise 50%, criticism 50%.

Out of 82 responses, 17 participants stated the 80/20 ratio exactly. with an additional 12 participants wanting even more praise. 2 participants said 99% praise (community choir and female voice choir) and perhaps most strikingly 1 said 100% praise (choral society). They also said this by saying "You can give constructive criticism without it having to be negative" and when asked how to do that "Giving advice on how to improve, modelling what they want when possible." In a separate question, 11 of the 82 participants said that negative feedback is never necessary.

Only 6 participants thought praise should be less than 50% with the highest amount of criticism being 80% from one singer, who sings in a symphonic chorus and was motivated to sing in a choir for the high standard of music and reputation of the organisation.

These findings suggest that the participants had different ways of viewing the definition of praise and criticism or positive and negative feedback and maybe even confused ideas about the subject:

No there is never room for abuse or lack of praise although my first school choir thrived on shouting and negative praise and actually she was the making of us (S23)

Depends what is meant by negative feedback. If it is feedback that identifies a problem and offers a solution in a supportive manner, then it is always necessary (S28)

It is perhaps unhelpful to discuss this topic using these terms that can be misconstrued in a dichotomous way of praise meaning that you are good and criticism meaning that you are bad.

Balancing energy

C7 stated:

I don't think of it as praise versus criticism, but I will be aware of the length of time in a rehearsal where I've been demanding for a long period. And a long period of time is 15 minutes. You know, you need to change the energy.

C3 similarly spoke about the need to make a change in a rehearsal:

Sometimes if you're working on something and it's taking ages, you can feel that point where you're not getting any further in that session, I think we all sense it. (C3)

It suggests that we have to think of feedback more as managing the “ebb and flow” (C7) of “energy levels” (C7), rather than trying to balance the praise to criticism ratio. C7 described criticism as usually being “a demand of positive energy”.

I am allowed to demand because you get results when you demand and if you are justified in what you are saying and you're in control of what you're saying, then that's fine, because that can give a, you know, a pep up and a change in energy. (C7)

C7 also spoke empathetically of being mindful “that people will have different energy levels because the time of year it is, the time of day it is or whatever.”

Interestingly, when asked for notable traits of a good conductor, one singer replied:

Energy that can be used by the choir and returned. (S69)

Conductors and singers were both asked about feedback in the final rehearsal or the final piece of advice just before a performance. The responses give a sense of the need to balance what is important and that perhaps getting that balance right for every person is hard to achieve:

the choir leader may say “that’s ok” but the adult choir members will recognise for themselves that it is not at the right standard and will go away and do their own individual work to improve their performance. (S4)

It’s too late at that point. Feedback should have been given much earlier. You have to let go at some point. You ruin performers’ dashing confidence too close to a performance. (S15)

Yes, I wouldn’t be upset if a conductor showed their frustration close to a concert. It can often galvanise a choir. (S47)

After the final rehearsal before a concert, I try to keep it as short as possible because they can't take on any extra information. It is unfair to load them with a whole list of things. So it's just the wrong energy. (C7)

Just before our performance, we want to somehow create some sort of cohesion as a unit, some sort of togetherness, it's going to be some sort of special moment of actually connecting with the audience and with each other. (C2)

Overall, the data suggests that a large proportion of choral leadership for adult amateur singers is people management, whether that is in creating a culture or in managing the flow of energy in rehearsals and performances and that it has a significant impact on a singer's level of confidence.

Conclusions and Recommendations

I had anticipated that this project would lead me to a choral conducting model similar to those mentioned in the literature review (Durrant, 2018; Jansson, Elstad & Døving, 2021). Instead I learned that, while competency in those skills is expected by singers, being an effective choral leader is not something that you can achieve via a wish list of traits. It is about people and creating a positive environment for them to learn and have fun in.

I learned not to be scared of being demanding, but to be sensitive to the energy flow within a rehearsal. It is important for a conductor to be their authentic self because singers want them to be honest. I have learned to put energy into building a culture, against which you can take your singers slightly out of their comfort zone to expand their experience in a positive way.

It was clear from the data that confidence and attitude were affected by feedback and I felt that there was much corroboration of the confidence study by Bonshor (2017). It seems that when singers receive specific and encouraging actionable advice or when improvement processes are put in place, such as C2's assessment system, that singers are able to achieve more.

Going forward, I would like to record the most common issues that are raised in choir rehearsals and create a troubleshooting guide with clear directions as to what a conductor might say to correct the problem. This would help me to clarify my thoughts and be able to express them in a more simple, succinct way and it potentially could help other conductors who do not have vocal pedagogy skills.

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APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

Please read the notes for guidance before completing ALL sections of the form.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity. Please see Checklist for details of process for different categories of application.

Delete the Guidance Notes at the end of the form BEFORE submitting your application

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:	Emma Lindsey			
2	Tick all boxes which apply:	Member of staff:	☐	Honorary research fellow:	☐
3	Undergraduate Student	☐	Taught Postgraduate Student	☒	Postgraduate Research Student
4	Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:	WAPPAR			
5	Campus:	Carmarthen			
6	E-mail address:	emma_lindsey@outlook.com			
7	Contact Telephone Number:	07769 706714			
For students:					
8	Student Number:	2016639			
9	Programme of Study:	MA Professional Practice (Voice Pedagogy)			
10	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Annette Fillery Travis			

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

1	Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)	YES	☒	NO	☐
					Date
2	If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known): Approval in principle must be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval	Research Degrees Committee	☐		
3		Institute Research Committee	☐		
4		Other (write in) WAPPAR Ethics Board Representative	☒		

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines.	
1	UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice	☒
2	UWTSD Research Data Management Policy	☒
3		☐

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

1	Does the research activity involve collaborators outside of the University?	YES	☐	NO	☒	
2	If Yes, please provide the name of the external organisation and name and contact details for the main contact person and confirmation this person has consented to their personal data being shared as part of this collaboration.					
3	Institution					
4	Contact person name					
5	Contact person e-mail address					
6	Has this individual consented to sharing their details on this form?	YES	☐	NO	☐	
7	Are you in receipt of a KESS scholarship?	YES	☐	NO	☐	
8	Is your research externally funded	YES	☐	NO	☐	
9	Are you specifically employed to undertake this research in either a paid or voluntary capacity?	Voluntary	YES	☐	NO	☐
10		Employed	YES	☐	NO	☐
11	Is the research being undertaken within an existing UWTSD Athrofa Professional Learning Partnership (APLP)	If YES then the permission question below does not need to be answered.	YES	☐	NO	☐
12	Permission to undertake the research has been provided by the partner organisation	(If YES attach copy) If NO the application cannot continue	YES	☐	NO	☐

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation

13	Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	YES	☐	NO	☐
14	If Yes, please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation				

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	An investigation into leadership styles and the effectiveness of praise and criticism in a choral setting.		
2	Proposed start date:	10 th September 2021	Proposed end date:	28 th January 2022
3	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words) Ensure that you write for a Non-Specialist Audience when outlining your response to the three points below: • Purpose of Research Activity • Proposed Research Question • Aims of Research Activity • Objectives of Research Activity Demonstrate, briefly, how Existing Research has informed the proposed activity and explain • What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge • How it addresses an area of importance.			
4	Purpose of Research Activity The choice of leadership style can be a critical factor in the success or failure of any organisation. Understanding the effects that a leadership style could have on a choral leader's interaction with and motivation of individual singers and on the choir as a whole could be fundamental. This qualitative-based investigation aims to explore the factors that contribute to an effective leadership style including the communication of praise and criticism in a way that positively influences confidence, attitude and achievement of choir members. (this box should expand as you type)			
5	Research Question • What characteristics contribute to an effective leadership style for a choral leader? • What is the impact of praise and criticism on confidence, attitude and achievement in the opinion of choir members and in the opinion of choir leaders? ◦ How is the impact affected by the type of feedback, when and how it is delivered, its justification and its specificity? (this box should expand as you type)			
6	Aims of Research Activity • To investigate the lived experience of choral leaders and choir members. • To understand how choral success is perceived by choral leaders and choir members. • To explore the reaction of choir members to different leadership styles in terms of confidence, attitude and achievement. • To discover choral leaders' perspectives on the use of leadership styles and the resulting confidence, attitude and achievement of choir members and the group as a whole. • To identify some of the characteristics of effective choral leadership. • To explore the reaction of choir members and choral leaders to different uses of feedback. • To identify some of the characteristics of effective feedback delivery. (this box should expand as you type)			

7	Objectives of Research Activity To suggest a model for effective leadership and methods for enhancing the delivery of feedback in a choral setting. (this box should expand as you type)
8	Proposed methods (maximum 600 words) Provide a brief summary of all the methods that may be used in the research activity, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed.
9	A qualitative approach using the following methods: 1. Semi-structured interviews with choral leaders that will be recorded and transcribed and sent to the participants for validation. 2. Online questionnaire which will be emailed to choir members for completion. These will consist of open-ended questions to elicit rich data. 3. Follow-up semi-structured interviews with some of the choir members who completed the questionnaire in order to gain further information and clarity. These interviews will be recorded and transcribed and sent to the participants for validation. In addition, observations of non-verbal communication will also be recorded. (this box should expand as you type)

10	Location of research activity Identify all locations where research activity will take place.
11	The interviews will take place over Zoom and the surveys will be completed online. (this box should expand as you type)
12	Research activity outside of the UK If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants.
13	N/A (this box should expand as you type)

14	Use of documentation not in the public domain: Are any documents NOT publicly available?	NO	☒
		YES	☐
15	If Yes, please provide details here of how you will gain access to specific documentation that is not in the public domain and that this is in accordance with prevailing data protection law of the country in question and England and Wales. (this box should expand as you type)		

SECTION F: Scope of Research Activity

1	Will the research activity include:	YES	NO
2	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☒	☐
3	Use of interviews?	☒	☐
4	Use of diaries?	☐	☒
5	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☒
6	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☒
7	Use of video or audio recording?	☒	☐
8	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☒
9	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	☒
10	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☒
11	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☒
12	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	☒
13	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☒
14	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☒
15	Other primary data collection methods, please explain in this box	☐	☒

	For example, 'focus groups'. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) in this box and tick the accompany box.		
16	Details of any other primary data collection method: (this box should expand as you type)		

If NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and **may** be exempt from **some** of the following sections (please refer to Guidance Notes).

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION G: Intended Participants

1	Who are the intended participants:	YES	NO
2	Students or staff at the University?	☐	☒
3	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	☒	☐
4	Vulnerable adults?	☐	☒
5	Children and Young People under the age of 18? (Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	☐	☒
6	Prisoners?	☐	☒
7	Young offenders?	☐	☒
8	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	☐	☒
9	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☒
10	Others (please identify specifically any group who may be unable to give consent) please indicate here and tick the appropriate box.	☐	☒
11	Other – please indicate here: (this box should expand as you type)	☐	☒

12	Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?	
13	How many participants are expected?	38 participants in total. I would expect to interview 8 choral leaders and send questionnaires to 30 choir members. I would then look to interview 8 of those choir members. (this box should expand as you type)
14	Who will the participants be?	Choral leaders and choir members. All participants will be 18 and over. (this box should expand as you type)
15	How will you identify the participants?	I will use my network of contacts and social media to initially recruit participants. I will then use snowball sampling to recruit further participants. (this box should expand as you type)

16	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
17	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☒	☐	☐
18	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☒	☐	☐
19	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☒	☐	☐
20	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☒	☐	☐
21	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☒	☐	☐
22	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☒	☐	☐
23	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☒	☐	☐
24	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	☒	☐	☐
25	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	☒	☐	☐
26	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
27	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			

28	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
29	Will participants be paid?	☐	☒	☐
30	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☒	☐	☐
31	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☒	☐
32	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☒	☐
33	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
34	I will be recording the Zoom interviews using my Mac and the software Otter.ai. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			

SECTION H: Anticipated Risks

1	Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them. If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.		
2	Full risk assessment completed and appended?	Yes	☐
		No	☒
3	Risks to participants For example: emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information		
4	Risk to Participant: Reputational risk or damage to the relationship between the participant and their choral leader/choir members if anonymity was not maintained in the disclosure of information in a research report or if the security of the held personal data was compromised.	How will you mitigate the Risk to Participant All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality and this list will be kept securely in a password-protected file. All data will be kept in password-protected cloud storage.	

	(this box should expand as you type)	(this box should expand as you type)		
5	If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities			
	N/A (this box should expand as you type)			
6	Risks to investigator For example: personal safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest			
	Risk to Investigator: Risk of being accused of damaging a participant's reputation or relationship with choir leader/choir members (this box should expand as you type)	How will you mitigate the Risk to Investigator: I can mitigate the risk by not naming participants or the choirs to which they are affiliated. (this box should expand as you type)		
7	University/institutional risks For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection			
	Risk to University: Data breach Reputational risk (this box should expand as you type)	How will you mitigate the Risk to University: All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality and this list will be kept securely in a password-protected file. All data will be kept in password-protected cloud storage. I will carry out the research with integrity and in a professional manner. I will comply with the University's Research Integrity and Ethics Code of Practice. (this box should expand as you type)		
8	Disclosure and Barring Service			
9	If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any contact with such participants.	YES	NO	N/A
10	Does your research require you to hold a current DBS Certificate?	☐	☒	☐

SECTION I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

1	Feedback What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?
	I will provide all participants with my email address. I will also provide the interviewed participants with a copy of the transcribed interview for validation. (this box should expand as you type)
2	Informed consent Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.
	I will email details of the research to interviewees in advance. I will inform them of the information that I am looking to gather, what is expected of them, the participant time commitment required and

	what will happen with the information that I collect prior to gaining a signed consent form from each of them. For questionnaire participants, I will provide the same information in an introductory section before the questions begin. I will inform participants that by clicking on the 'Next' button they are providing consent. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
3	Confidentiality / Anonymity Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.
	All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality. I will not name participants or the choirs to which they are affiliated in my research report. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

SECTION J: Data Protection and Storage

In completing this section refer to the University's Research Data Management Policy and the extensive resources on the University's Research Data Management web pages (<http://uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/>).

1	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 "GDPR" and the Data Protection Act 2018 "DPA")?	YES	NO
	"Personal data" means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person.	☒	☐
2	If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
	I will be collecting participant names, email addresses, signed consent forms, audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews as well as the answers from the questionnaires. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
3	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	YES	NO
	"Special category data" means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects' – (a) racial or ethnic origin, (b) political opinions, (c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature, (d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992), (e) physical or mental health or condition, (f) sexual life, (g) genetics, (h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes),	☐	☒
4	If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
	N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
5	Will the research activity involve storing personal data and/or special category data on one of the following:	YES	NO

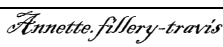
6	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	☐	☒
7	University computers?	☐	☒
8	Private company computers?	☐	☒
9	Home or other personal computers?	☒	☐
10	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☐	☒
11	"Cloud" storage or websites?	☒	☐
12	Other – specify:	☐	☐
13	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	All data will be kept in password-protected company Google cloud storage which will not be shared. Audio data will be transcribed will be shown to participants to check accuracy of reporting. All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality and this list will be kept securely in a password-protected file. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
14	All Data Storage		
15	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	YES	NO
16	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☒	☐
17	Sharing of data with others at the University?	☒	☐
18	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☒	☐
19	Export of data outside the European Union or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	☒
20	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☒	☐
21	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
22	Use of data management system?	☐	☒
23	Data archiving?	☐	☒
24	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and DPA (and/or any international equivalent):		
	All data will be kept in password-protected company Google cloud storage which will not be shared. Audio data will be transcribed will be shown to participants to check accuracy of reporting. All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality and this list will be kept securely in a password-protected file. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted. In accordance with the DPA2018, participants will have the right to ask to see what data is held relating to them, and this data will be deleted immediately if the participant requests this, in which case the data will not be used in the project. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
25	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		
	Emma Lindsey <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
26	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:		

	Emma Lindsey <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
27	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.		
	All data will be encrypted and kept in password-protected company Google cloud storage which will not be shared. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
28	Please indicate if your data will be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository (see https://researchdata.uwtsd.ac.uk/). If so please explain. <i>(Most relevant to academic staff)</i>		
	N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
29	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	YES	☒
		NO	☐
30	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	YES	☒
		NO	☐

SECTION K: Declaration

31	The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants.		
	In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
	Signature of applicant:		Date: 6 August 2021

For STUDENT Submissions:

32	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Annette fillery-travis	Date: 4/9/21
33	Signature:		

For STAFF Submissions:

34	Academic Director/ Assistant Dean:		Date:
35	Signature:		

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

☒	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
☒	I have completed ALL RELEVANT sections of the form in full.
☒	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
☐	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (where appropriate)
☐	I have attached a full risk assessment (and have NOT completed Section H of this form) (where appropriate) ONLY TICK IF YOU HAVE ATTACHED A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT
☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
☒	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Academic Director.
☒	I have deleted the guidance notes before submitting the PG2 for consideration

RESEARCH STUDENTS AND STAFF ONLY

All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk, with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name. You will be informed of the outcome of your claim by email; therefore it is important that you check your University and personal email accounts regularly.

STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.



Registered Office:
Minster House, 126a High Street
Whitton, Twickenham TW2 7LL

University of Wales Trinity St David

6th August 2021

To whom it may concern,

WORK-BASED LEARNING RESEARCH PROJECT

I am writing to confirm approval of the research by Emma Lindsey into leadership styles and the effective use of praise and criticism in a choral setting.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "elindsey".

Emma Lindsey

Participant Information and Consent Form

An investigation into leadership styles and the effectiveness of praise and criticism in a choral setting.

What is the research about? This project will focus on the relationship between choral conductors and adult amateur choral singers. It aims to explore the factors that contribute to an effective leadership style including the communication of praise and criticism in a way that positively influences confidence, attitude and achievement of choir members.

What will my involvement be? You will be asked to take part in an interview on Zoom for no more than an hour. The interview will be recorded and a transcription of it will be emailed to you for your validation that it is a true account.

Do I have to take part? Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are also free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason and with no negative consequences. For your information, there is no payment or direct benefit to you from participating in this research.

What are the possible risks of taking part? There could be a risk to the participants if personal data is accessed or if anonymity is not maintained. However, to mitigate this risk, your data is carefully managed as described below and your identity and any associated people or choirs will be presented anonymously in the research report.

How will my information be managed and used? The data will be analysed as part of the study and will be included in a final report, which will be submitted to the University and the Voice Study Centre in January 2022.

Your responses will be kept securely in password-protected cloud storage. This will only be accessible by the researcher. Your information will be stored using a pseudonymised system. This means that your data will be edited so that you are referred to by a unique identifier. Only the researcher will have access to a password-protected document that links your unique identifier to your real identity.

The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted. In accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, participants will have the right to ask to see what data is held

relating to them. On request from the participant, the data will be deleted immediately and will not be used in the project.

Who has reviewed this study? This research project has been granted ethical approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wales Trinity St David.

Contact details for further information If you have any concerns or wish to seek further information, you are encouraged to contact the researcher (emma_lindsey@outlook.com) in the first instance. If you do not feel comfortable doing so, then you can contact Kate Cubley at the Voice Study Centre (kate@voicestudycentre.com).

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the above participant information and have had the opportunity to ask questions which have been fully answered.	
2. I agree to take part in the above study.	
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw without giving any reason and with no negative consequences.	

Name of participant

Signature

Date

Name of researcher

Signature

Date

Dear choral singer,

Thank you for your consideration to take part in this research. The data collected from this questionnaire will be used in a project, which forms part of an MA in Vocal Pedagogy with the University of Wales Trinity St David and the Voice Study Centre.

Questionnaire respondents should be adult amateur choral singers based in the UK. Participants should not have any choral conducting experience.

This page will provide you with further information on the study and will ask for your consent to participate if you decide that you would like to take part.

If you have any questions, please email me at emma_lindsey@outlook.com.

*Many thanks,
Emma Lindsey*

What is the research about? This project will focus on the relationship between choral conductors and adult amateur choral singers. It aims to explore the factors that contribute to an effective leadership style including the communication of praise and criticism in a way that positively influences confidence, attitude and achievement of choir members.

What will my involvement be? You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire, which should take approximately 20 minutes to answer.

At the end of the questionnaire, you will be asked whether you are willing to participate further if clarification or follow-up is required. If you consent to being contacted, you will be asked for your name and email address.

Do I have to take part? Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are also free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason and with no negative consequences. For your information, there is no direct benefit to you from participating in this research.

What are the possible risks of taking part? There could be a risk to the participants if personal data is accessed or if anonymity is not maintained. However, to mitigate this risk, your data is carefully managed as described below and your identity and any associated people or choirs will be presented anonymously in the research report. Additionally, as mentioned, it is not compulsory for you to provide your name and email address in this questionnaire.

How will my information be managed and used? The data will be analysed as part of the study and will be included in a final report, which will be submitted to the University and the Voice Study Centre in January 2022.

Your responses will be kept securely in password-protected cloud storage. This will only be accessible by the researcher. Your information will be stored using a pseudonymised system. This means that if you provide your name and email address, your data will be edited so that you are referred to by a unique identifier. Only the researcher will have access to a password-protected document that links your unique identifier to your real identity.

The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted. In accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, participants will have the right to ask to see what data is held relating to them. On request from the participant, the data will be deleted immediately and will not be used in the project. If you have responded to the questionnaire anonymously though, there will be no way to identify your data to extract it.

Who has reviewed this study? This research project has been granted ethical approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wales Trinity St David.

Contact details for further information If you have any concerns or wish to seek further information, you are encouraged to contact the researcher (emma_lindsey@outlook.com) in the first instance. If you do not feel comfortable doing so, then you can contact Kate Cubley at the Voice Study Centre (kate@voicestudycentre.com).

By clicking on the 'Next' button, I confirm that I am an adult amateur choral singer based in the UK without choral conducting experience, that I understand the information above and am willing to take part in this research.

* 1. Please confirm your gender

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer to self-describe
- ☐ Prefer not to say

* 2. Please confirm your age

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ☐ 18-24 | ☐ 55-64 |
| ☐ 25-34 | ☐ 65-74 |
| ☐ 35-44 | ☐ 75-84 |
| ☐ 45-54 | ☐ 85+ |

* 3. Please confirm details of any formal music education you have had including lessons, courses and qualifications.

* 4. How many years of choral singing experience do you have?

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| ☐ Less than 5 years | ☐ 31 to 40 years |
| ☐ 5 to 15 years | ☐ 41 to 50 years |
| ☐ 16 to 30 years | ☐ Over 50 years |

* 5. How many amateur adult choirs do you currently belong to?

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ☐ None | ☐ 3 |
| ☐ 1 | ☐ 4 |
| ☐ 2 | ☐ 5 and above |

If none, please can you provide more information on your current choral singing situation

* 6. Which term best describes the type(s) of choir(s) it is/they are (choose as many as relevant)

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ Choral society | ☐ Chamber choir | ☐ Female voice choir |
| ☐ Symphonic chorus | ☐ Male voice choir | ☐ Gospel choir |
| ☐ Church choir | ☐ Community choir | |
| ☐ Workplace choir | ☐ Barbershop choir | |
| ☐ Other (please specify) | | |

7. What motivates you to keep singing in choirs?

* 8. How many conductors have you had the experience of performing with as a choral singer?

☐ 1

☐ 11 to 20

☐ 2 to 5

☐ 20+

☐ 6 to 10

None of the above (please explain further)

* 9. How many conductors do you currently sing with on a regular basis?

☐ None

☐ 3

☐ 1

☐ 4

☐ 2

☐ 5 and above

☐ If none, please can you provide further information

* 10. How important is it for you to like a conductor? How important is it for you to respect a conductor? Is one of these more important to you?

* 11. A recent study (Jansson, Elstad and Døving, 2021) investigated choral conducting competencies from the perspective of choral conductors.

From your perspective as an adult amateur choral singer, please rate how important you think these competencies are for conductors from 1 (less important) to 5 (indispensable).

	1 (less important)	2	3	4	5 (indispensable)
Repertoire overview and knowledge of music styles/genres	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Score overview and score understanding	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Error detection/aural skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gestural skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vocal technique	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Language skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Choir acoustics (how tones are shaped and voices sound)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Organise and manage the rehearsing process	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Provide an effective learning approach for a given piece of music	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Be able to give singers specific feedback and guidance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Know when to stop/correct and when to let the singers self-improve	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Place singers and voice groups and stage the choir in the room	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Presence and concentration in the face of the ensemble	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Face the ensemble with sincerity and honesty	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Approach the music and the ensemble with devotion and passion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Have a clear idea of the how the music should sound	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

1 (less important)

2

3

4

5 (indispensable)

Act with authority and
self-confidence

☐☐☐☐☐

12. Are there any other notable traits that a good conductor has?

* 13. What undermines the credibility and/or trustworthiness of a conductor?

14. Other than the communication of praise and criticism, can you think of any examples of conductor behaviour that has had a significant positive or negative impact on rehearsals?

* 15. How important is it to receive praise from a conductor?

- ☐ Extremely important ☐ Not so important
- ☐ Very important ☐ Not at all important
- ☐ Somewhat important

* 16. Do you think negative feedback from a conductor is necessary to improve a choir's performance or do you think it can be achieved purely through positive reinforcement?

- ☐ Negative feedback is always necessary
- ☐ Negative feedback is sometimes necessary
- ☐ Negative feedback is never necessary

Any further thoughts?

* 17. If you think negative feedback is necessary, what do you think the balance should be between praise and criticism in an average rehearsal, expressed in percentages e.g. praise 50%, criticism 50%. (Please enter a number only and do not include the % sign. Your two numbers should total 100.)

Praise (%)

Criticism (%)

* 18. How can a conductor frame criticism in a constructive rather than destructive way?

* 19. Please rank the following types of feedback* used in rehearsals from most effective (1) to least effective (9) for achieving a better performance with adult amateur choirs.

*adapted from Biddlecombe's Choral Feedback Assessment Form (2012)



Exceptional positive: a rare moment of high level shared satisfaction that most often happens in performance



Heightened positive e.g. a sincere "I'm very proud of you"



Specific positive e.g. "Nice rhythmic energy there"



Non-specific positive e.g. "Good"



No feedback given e.g. "Again"



Specific negative e.g. "Tenors you're under the pitch at 16"



Non-specific negative e.g. "You have to do better"



Heightened negative e.g. a frustrated "How many times do we have to go over this?"



Exceptional negative e.g. the conductor walking out

20. Any comments on your choices in question 19? Do you think your responses might be different for the final rehearsal before a performance where improvement was still very much needed?

21. Can you think of any examples of feedback (verbal and/or non-verbal) from a conductor that is particularly memorable and why?

22. What makes you more or less receptive to conductor feedback?

* 23. When a conductor gives feedback to the choir, how do you know if it relevant to you or not? Do you always take action?

* 24. How would you feel if a conductor targeted their feedback at specific individual singers? And at small sections?

* 25. Has singing in a choir significantly increased your confidence and how much of that is due to a conductor?

26. In thinking about the conductors that you've worked with, do you feel that they have used an appropriate leadership style for your choir or have you ever felt that they would be better suited to a different type of choir? If relevant, please explain further.

* 27. Are you willing to be contacted by the researcher for clarification or follow-up, if required?

☐ Yes

☐ No

* 28. Please confirm your first and last name

* 29. Please confirm your email

**Thank you very much for taking part in this
questionnaire.**

**If you have any questions or further thoughts
please email
emma_lindsey@outlook.com.**

References

- Biddlecombe, T. (2012) 'Assessing and enhancing feedback of choral conductors through analysis and training', *International journal of research in choral singing*, 4(1), pp. 2-18
- Jansson, D., Elstad, B. and Døving, E. (2021) 'Choral conducting competences: perceptions and priorities', *Research studies in music education*, 43(1), pp. 3–21

1 **APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS (WITH CODING)**

3 **C1 Interview – 17 November 2021 2pm**

5 **RESEARCHER**

6 Can you describe the choirs that you currently conduct?

8 **C1**

9 Community choirs, so it's basically anyone who fancies having a sing.

11 **RESEARCHER**

12 And how many of those are there?

14 **C1**

15 I've got three choirs. Pre-pandemic we had about 185 at our biggest across three, but we are
16 down to just under 100 at the moment. But obviously, hoping that some will come back
17 afterwards. Some people are nervous. The demographic for those types of choirs tends to
18 be 60 plus, so they are in the more vulnerable category. The other type of stuff I do is musical
19 theatre youth projects, so they're obviously amateur as well. I don't know if that's of any
20 interest, but they are different beasts to the adults.

22 **RESEARCHER**

23 I'm specifically studying adults, but it is interesting to know the difference that you experience
24 between the two.

26 **C1**

27 The main difference for me is that kids do what you tell them or ask them [*conveyed with a*
28 *smile*] and adults tend not to. Probably because they're used to being told what to do, you
29 know, in a school environment and that sort of thing so they're quite compliant. So you can
30 just say, shut up, if they're being really loud, and they are just quiet. If you try that with an
31 adult choir, "That's a bit rude, we're paying you for this". Yeah, that sort of thing. So you do
32 have to be slightly different in how you approach it.

35 **RESEARCHER**

36 Would you please confirm any details of formal music education you've had, whether that's
37 lessons or exams or courses or anything?

38

39 **C1**

40 Yeah, I did the normal music stuff at school from when I was about six years old, started on
41 the flute and then progressed onto piano, but always sang in choirs and played the guitar and
42 anything else that they threw at me basically. Then I sort of made a conscious decision when
43 I did my A levels and things and then basically decided to get a job as opposed to going off
44 to music college. Because basically, I was gonna take a year off, got a job, enjoyed getting
45 paid. Yeah, and that sort of thing. So basically, I didn't take it any further than the normal sort
46 of Associated Board exams that we did, but obviously I kept up with music.

47

48 Got quite into musical theatre, but was obviously more interested in being on the
49 production/creative side rather than the onstage bit because that wasn't my passion. Yeah,
50 and just sort of picked it up really, you know, like the conducting and directing. I'm 56 now
51 and so I've had 50 years' experience of singing in choirs, playing in orchestras and that sort
52 of thing. So then just got around on the local music scene, played in orchestras, have been
53 the chairman of orchestras, been in choirs, been on committees, that sort of thing, then into
54 the musical theatre stuff. So yeah, so I just sort of learned on the job. On the conducting side,
55 I went to music school and that sort of stuff, for the actual practical side of things. I think
56 conducting and directing is more of an innate skill. I mean, I know plenty of professional
57 musicians, who've spent years at the Royal Academy that can't conduct and they can't move
58 and it looks really awkward or they don't have the personality skills to be able to do it. I think
59 it is specific to individuals.

60

61 **RESEARCHER**

62 And how would you describe your leadership style in the choirs that you currently run? And
63 does it vary between the groups?

64

65 **C1**

66 Yes and no. There's probably two points to that. I'm in a partnership in this particular choir
67 with another guy. He's got a completely different musical style and personality to me. So I
68 tend to come across as Mr. Nasty and he comes across as Mr. Nice. Basically, I'm much

Commented [EL1]: Leadership characteristics: Balanced approach

69 more, I think because of the way that I've been brought up, I'm more on the classical sort of
70 side, so I'm a lot more specific about timings, endings, the way people are pronouncing
71 words, all that sort of stuff, which is just as important in more modern songs as it is in the
72 classical side of things. Whereas my partner tends to be much more "Oh yeah, that's lovely,
73 oh, you're brilliant" and everything like that. And I think a lot of things get passed by. He could
74 get a room of 50 people that have never sung before singing in three-part harmony in about
75 30 seconds because he's got that personality. Whereas I will get them sounding nice if that
76 makes sense.

Commented [EL2]: Leadership characteristics: Precision

Commented [EL3]: Leadership characteristics: Inspiring

78 **RESEARCHER**

79 So you work well together?

81 **C1**

82 We tend to work in that way. I do get quite passionate about a point, and it can come across
83 as me being grumpy but it's not me being grumpy, it's just wanting to get it right. So I have
84 had in the past people say "you're grumpy", I'm not grumpy I'm just focused - it is probably a
85 better way of saying it. Some people prefer just to be told, this is what it is. But I've learned
86 this in all walks of life: some people need cuddles, some people need a slap, if that makes
87 sense. People have different motivations or ways of being motivated, so the skill is to work
88 out your audience, who you're talking to and what they actually need to motivate them. I do
89 tend to use a lot of jokes to get people laughing because it relaxes them a little bit and that's
90 more my personality anyway. So I would tend to have a bit of a laugh, just to try and soften
91 the the blow, so to speak.

Commented [EL4]: Leadership characteristics: Goal-orientated

Commented [EL5]: Leadership characteristics: Precision

Commented [EL6]: Leadership characteristics: Focused

Commented [EL7]: Leadership characteristics: Understanding singers

Commented [EL8]: Leadership characteristics: Motivating

Commented [EL9]: Leadership characteristics: Sense of humour

93 The ethos of my choir is that anybody can come, so basically I've got people there that I can
94 hear them and they're out of tune and they're never going to be in tune, but that's not what
95 we're about. So I have to separate that from doing a more professional job, as in you know,
96 we are going to put on a show in a theatre or something and people are going to pay £25 to
97 come and see us or whatever. Or people paying a lot of money for a course. Yeah, then I will
98 be stricter and there is generally an audition process and there is no audition process for my
99 choir.

101 So as an example, a couple of weeks ago, we've got one lady - she's a really, really good
102 singer actually, but she sings with an awful lot of vibrato, but she sings very confidently. My

103 partner said that she is putting a lot of the other people off and I said that we can't say anything
104 to her because she's good. Same as we can't say anything to the person who can't sing.
105 She's in tune, she's got a lot of vibrato and tends to intimidate the others because she belts
106 it out. But I prefer that. My ethos is strong and wrong. I want to hear if someone is doing it
107 wrong.

Commented [EL10]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Understanding the organisation

108
109 Especially at one of our groups, who sing at a big church in Thorpe Bay, and it's quite
110 cavernous, and they're not particularly strong singers. So, you know, I do have to sort of stop
111 and keep mentioning that you have got it right, what you're singing is exactly what I want to
112 hear. So, open your mouth now and just use a bit more air to get it through and try and
113 encourage them that way. And sometimes we will stop and just say, "Okay, well, let's just
114 sing one note in the midrange and just give me as loud as you can." We talk about the
115 diaphragm, we start talking about more technical things and demonstrate how to produce
116 that sound. We say "Okay once you've got that, that is your minimum sound, always get in
117 that position to be able to do it." So there's lots of different ways of trying to get people
118 motivated, I think the main thing is just not to be rude to anybody.

Commented [EL11]: *Leadership characteristics:* Aural
skills

Commented [EL12]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Encouraging

119
120 I also think it's important for the choir to give them something exciting and different and stuff
121 that they wouldn't normally be able to do. Being at a theatre with a West End musical star
122 and backing her with a 15-piece live band is a nice experience for them. And what we did
123 after that was we went on a tour to Spain. A guy in the choir happens to organise musical
124 tours, so he organised this tour and we tried to make it holiday-like in case it didn't work as
125 well the first time. It was really well received and people loved it. We started to put other
126 events like that together but then the pandemic came along, which scuppered them.

Commented [EL13]: *Leadership characteristics:* Vocal
pedagogy skills

Commented [EL14]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Motivating

Commented [EL15]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Polite/being rude

Commented [EL16]: *Leadership characteristics:* Providing
extraordinary experiences

128 RESEARCHER

129 In thinking about your role in leading choirs, whether in rehearsal or in performance or in
130 those bits in between, please can you describe the different skills that you need to have to
131 be able to do that effectively? And I'm really thinking in the very broadest sense of being a
132 conductor.

134 C1

135 There's obviously soft skills as well, which can be as equally important. So for me,
136 consistency is a big point. I'm a big stickler for me being consistent and saying the same thing

137 each week, conducting in the same way, remembering what notes I've actually put them on.
138 Just to make it as simple and as least confusing as possible. You've got your standard
139 technical skills of being able to be clear with downbeats, bringing people in, being clear with
140 what you want by saying okay we are going from this section. I sometimes struggle because
141 I haven't got a naturally loud voice. So they do struggle to hear me sometimes, so I do have
142 to make a conscious effort to be quite clear. So it's being consistent, being clear and concise.
143 Clear direction. It's being able to explain what we're singing about, what the music is about,
144 what you should be feeling at this point.

Commented [EL17]: Leadership characteristics: Consistency

Commented [EL18]: Leadership characteristics: Conducting/gesturing skills

Commented [EL19]: Leadership characteristics: Clear direction

Commented [EL20]: Leadership characteristics: Providing musical context

Commented [EL21]: Leadership characteristics: Directing expression

145
146 And another big thing that I've learned from musical theatre is the physicality of singing. A
147 good example I tend to use is the opening of Sweeney Todd. If you just say "Attend the tale
148 of Sweeney Todd" yeah, it's not going to come out. If you're there, *[demonstrates enhanced,*
149 *dramatic posture appropriate for role]* it will come out more. So physicality helps with voice
150 production as well, so I tend to try and incorporate that sort of thing into it as well, which I
151 think is really, really important.

Commented [EL22]: Leadership characteristics: Vocal pedagogy skills

152
153 And then, there is obviously your softer skills like how you're explaining things, how you're
154 dealing with people, what you do when somebody asks a question and you don't know the
155 answer. Or do you baffle them with science for 10 minutes talking to them about the shape
156 of your soft palate when you've got your tongue in X position. Do you need to know that at
157 that level? They don't need to know that because it means nothing to them. I can't say to
158 them can you just move the sound a bit further back or something like that, which I would say
159 to a more professional singer because they know exactly what I'm talking about. If I said after
160 three beats just start to warm it a little bit, they wouldn't have any idea what that meant. And
161 even if I said I just want a little bit more vibrato on there, they wouldn't know how to produce
162 that. So at that level for amateurs, you have to, I think, bring yourself back a little bit and just
163 concentrate on knowing what you can get out of them. So I will probably only go as far as
164 talking about yes, diaphragms and mouth shape for vowel shapes is probably as far as I go
165 when I'm sort of warming up and talking about technical things and obviously diphthongs and
166 that sort of stuff, obviously. But that's obviously easier to understand. But I tend to keep it at
167 that level. So it's really just being as simple and explanatory as possible.

Commented [EL23]: Leadership characteristics: Generic teaching skills

Commented [EL24]: Leadership characteristics: People management

Commented [EL25]: Leadership characteristics: Understanding singers

Commented [EL26]: Leadership characteristics: Clear direction

169 RESEARCHER

170 Are there any particularly notable traits that you think a good conductor has?

171

172 **C1**

173 Again, I think clear and consistent, I come back to that because that's something I've
174 struggled with in the past. I've had many people that are just a bit like this *[waves arms in*
175 *rapid circles]* I have no idea where I'm up to. I want a *[demonstrates clear, strong downbeat]*.
176 Especially, if I've got lots of rests I need to know that's my first beat of the bar.

177

178 Take the opening of "Who will buy?" from Oliver, where you've got the flower singers coming
179 in, that sort of thing, they've all got entrances, but you can't physically bring them all in. So
180 it's actually saying, okay, these are the ones that I'm going to bring in and actually stick to
181 that each time. I've struggled with that in the past where a conductor hasn't done that or they
182 have said yeah, oh, we want that loud, then we want it quiet, then the next week it's loud and
183 the next week it's quiet again. Make your mind up, which one you want. That drives me mad,
184 so I try not to do it myself.

185

186 **RESEARCHER**

187 Going back to the partnership that you have leading the choirs, how do you two split
188 rehearsals?

189

190 **C1**

191 It tends to be repertoire based, so he might have his favourite songs and I'll have my favourite
192 songs or songs that I've introduced or songs that he's introduced. So he tends to stick with
193 them and I tend to stick with mine.

194

195 **RESEARCHER**

196 Do you both attend every rehearsal?

197

198 **C1**

199 We both attend every rehearsal and tend to split it in half really. It can cause problems
200 because this week we have a performance and I have a wedding that day so I can't make it.
201 Luckily it's Christmas stuff so you know that's fairly generic. I'm quite comfortable conducting
202 anything because I'm a good sight reader, I can read music and I'm more technical, he is
203 more ear based. So he tends to not look. He's great, he has skills like "We're in G major
204 there, so if we get them to sing that", whereas I can see it, if it is written down, but he knows

Commented [EL27]: Leadership characteristics: Clear direction

Commented [EL28]: Leadership characteristics: Consistency

Commented [EL29]: Leadership characteristics: Consistency

Commented [EL30]: Leadership characteristics: Understanding the score

Commented [EL31]: Leadership characteristics: Aural skills

205 what notes that they need to be on and will just play them on the piano and I just can't do
206 that. They're very different skills. So he's doing some of the numbers that I would normally
207 do. And it's interesting watching somebody else conduct your number. You know, he's trying
208 to do things like "I'm just gonna shorten that note and do that"- well no, if you just brought
209 them off on the previous note they could have taken a breath so you don't have to make that
210 a quaver and it conflicts with the backing track and sounds funny and they've learnt it that
211 way and they can do it that way. We aren't always able to communicate without getting the
212 hump with each other, which is the difficulty of doing it with someone else - his style is
213 completely different.

214
215 **RESEARCHER**

216 Do you think that your approach achieves more?

217
218 **C1**

219 I think my approach achieves more in the fact that I'm quite close to some of the people and
220 have had various conversations with members now and they have said that they prefer me
221 when we are doing anything that is slightly complicated, that needs people being brought in
222 and being clear and direct. But the flip side of that is he is really, really, really, really good at,
223 as I say, if you got 30 people together, he would have them singing in three-part harmony,
224 very simple three-part harmony, really easily. So when we do concerts, he is really great at
225 communicating with the audience, especially for audience participation. His personality is
226 much more people-orientated. |
227 So, you know, sometimes I wish that I had my technical skills but with his personality skills,
228 because I think that that would be a really, really good combination. And that's how I think we
229 get your Gareth Malones and those sort of people who obviously make it bigger. Not that I'm
230 a lover of Gareth Malone, but that's another story. Having a big personality as well as a talent.
231 If I know what I'm talking about and I'm passionate about it, I can be really, really confident.
232 But I'm actually sort of quite shy really. So I'm fine at directing because I know what I want to
233 hear.

234
235 One of the things that we have been thinking about is doing some corporate events because
236 that is where his skills sort of really lie. So I can write it down on paper. I can get it out so that
237 we can have any pianist come in and they'll be able to read it or if one of us is away I can get

Commented [EL32]: Leadership characteristics: Clear direction

Commented [EL33]: Leadership characteristics: Communication

Commented [EL34]: Leadership characteristics: Clear direction

Commented [EL35]: Leadership characteristics: Understanding the score

Commented [EL36]: Leadership characteristics: Conducting/gesturing skills

Commented [EL37]: Leadership characteristics: Personality/charisma

238 somebody to come in and cover the choir because I can give them the music exactly as it's
239 supposed to be.

240

241 So yeah, and he's also very, **very good at arranging songs as well**. He can hear a song and
242 he can mash it up with another song quite easily because he understands chord structures
243 intrinsically, whereas I have to work them out. So he does a lot of our arranging. We do a lot
244 of arranging of our own numbers. And he does that and then I tend to write it down once he's
245 had the idea and then I have to make the bars fit and notate it where it is supposed to be
246 because that's where my skill lies. I think mine is not more efficient, but you get a **better end**
247 **product because I will dot the Is and cross the Ts basically**. I won't have people sort of trailing
248 **off, if they're going to stay on for three beats, they stay on for three beats and they come off**
249 **here every single time consistently so they learn that**, so I think that is ultimately the better
250 **style**.

251

252 **RESEARCHER**

253 If I could just ask you one final question: What sort of feedback do you give mid-performance
254 and post-performance?

255

256 **C1**

257 **I tend to give them a quiet sort of like thumbs up and smile at the end of a number, especially**
258 **if it's one that they've been particularly worrying about or one that they feel that they are not**
259 **ready for yet. Through rehearsal, I'm trying to reassure them that I wouldn't make them sing**
260 **something if I wasn't confident that they'll be able to do that. So I do try to tend to smile at**
261 **them and so give them a bit of encouragement that way**.

262

263 **RESEARCHER**

264 And if it goes wrong?

265

266 **C1**

267 **I have unfortunately got one of those faces that goes [demonstrating a scrunched-up "sour"**
268 **facial expression]. They just laugh at me now and they know exactly what I mean. But I will**
269 **do that sometimes and laugh because I'm making a joke of it as well. If something seriously,**
270 **seriously goes wrong, I will still say you didn't do too bad. They're not stupid, they know what**
271 **it means. But you know, I would never, never say that it was awful. I might do that in rehearsal**

Commented [EL38]: *Leadership characteristics:* Arranging songs

Commented [EL39]: *Leadership characteristics:* Consistency

Commented [EL40]: *Leadership characteristics:* Precision

Commented [EL41]: *Feedback:* Non-verbal (positive)

Commented [EL42]: *Feedback:* Encouraging

Commented [EL43]: *Feedback:* Non-verbal (negative)

Commented [EL44]: *Feedback:* Use of humour

Commented [EL45]: *Feedback:* Post-performance feedback

272 to say you know, if that happens in real life, we would be really screwed. It's about judging
273 what mood they're in as well, as to whether they can take the criticism.

Commented [EL46]: *Feedback:* Communication

Commented [EL47]: *Feedback:* Understanding singers

274

275 I do think it's really important that you do have to stick up for yourself as well. It's always me
276 that they go to and complain, you know. I'm in mid-rehearsal and they say "Why are you
277 making us do this, we hate this song" and that sort of thing. I did sort of get a little bit annoyed
278 a few weeks ago and said to this woman (and some people giggled when I said it), "It's all
279 fine giving feedback, but I'd much rather that you said it to me personally rather than in the
280 group because you don't like that song because the constant moaning every time we mention
281 it puts a downer on it before we've even started. So comments like that actually bring the rest
282 of the choir down and so we need to learn to keep those comments to ourselves or bring
283 them up on one-to-one which is absolutely fine." After her comment, we sang it again and it
284 was really, really awful. So I had this conversation and said try to be upbeat about it and not
285 feel defeated before we've even started singing and they sang it really, really well. So I said
286 you know that that's a really good example of how you're approaching something can make
287 a complete difference to your performance. I wondered if I had gone a little bit far, but it is
288 what I was feeling and I don't want that sort of chat in my choir basically. And I think if there
289 is something specific like that that you have to say, in a polite as way as possible, I'm not
290 having a go, but I really would rather that you didn't and give an explanation. They need to
291 know what that reason is.

Commented [EL48]: *Feedback:* Communication

Commented [EL49]: *Feedback:* Managing culture

Commented [EL50]: *Feedback:* Polite/being rude

Commented [EL51]: *Feedback:* Providing an explanation

292

293 Somebody has to be in charge because there's more than one person doing something, so
294 we need to all be able to do the same thing. I'm that person in charge. So you have to look
295 at me if I'm directing. You look at me, you don't look at your neighbour, you don't look at
296 whoever or the pianist or whatever, you know, you're with me, and if we're going to be wrong,
297 we do it together and most people wouldn't ever notice.

Commented [EL52]: *Leadership characteristics:* People management

298

299 So that's how I tend to try and approach things and it seems to have worked. I've heard good
300 things about us – I know lots of people from musical groups around here. I think the interesting
301 thing about being in this sort of community, I'll happily listen to other groups because you
302 learn things. Three or four years ago, I was over in Sydney for a few months and I joined the
303 Sydney Lesbian and Gay Choir because I wanted something to do in the evenings when I
304 was there and I thought it would be interesting to see how other community choirs work. And
305 it's really, really interesting to see some of the things that they did, which I do and other things

306 that they did, which were really good ideas: simple things like having a guestbook of songs,
307 so that if somebody comes along for a trial, they can say this is what we are singing for the
308 season, have this book and then obviously give us this folder when you leave. Such a simple
309 idea, so there's no scrubbing round for music and then saying I'm not sure if you're joining us
310 so can I have it back?

311

312 **RESEARCHER**

313 Excellent idea, I will have to use that too.

314

315 It's been lovely talking to you. Thanks very, very much, I really appreciate it.

316

317 - *End of interview* -

Commented [EL53]: Leadership characteristics: Self-development

318 **C2 Interview - 24 November 2021 6pm**

319

320 **RESEARCHER**

321 So I'd love to start by asking you to describe the choirs that you currently conduct.

322

323 **C2**

324 I currently conduct two barbershop choirs: I conduct a women's and a men's barbershop choir
325 in London. And then part of the rest of my day job is also working as a vocal coach with lots
326 of choruses across the country. And then I also work part-time as a music teacher in a pre-
327 prep school, so I also deal with children's choirs down to age five, six and seven as well. So
328 lots of conducting of different ages really at the moment.

329

330 **RESEARCHER**

331 Please can you confirm details of any formal music education you've had in terms of lessons,
332 exams, courses - anything would be interesting.

333

334 **C2**

335 So I have a music degree, I studied music at Bristol University. I then went onto do a PGCE,
336 but in primary teaching. So now I teach music but I did teach generic class teaching before
337 that for a couple of years before going into music. I've done that now for quite a while now -
338 maybe six or seven years I've done primary music and two years before that just generic
339 class teaching.

340

341 My main actual kind of background in music was more as a brass player and as a composer
342 and arranger and then just the hobby side of music was more the choral singing that I was
343 doing and the barbershop singing that was the sort of stuff I did for fun. And then there aren't
344 very many trained musicians in the UK barbershop field that are conducting and stuff like
345 that. So I kind of fell into it accidentally really as an expert of music and then ended up
346 conducting groups at university and then leading onto work with a choir in Bristol, where I
347 lived for a little while: worked as a section leader and assistant director there. And then when
348 I moved back to London, the women's choir happened to be hiring a conductor and some
349 friends and I started the men's chorus that I conduct and then went on from there.

350

351 So training as a choral director: I've had conducting training at university, but I conducted the
352 university wind orchestra and things like that. And I did a lot of brass band conducting. So
353 the basics of conducting will come from that sort of side of it and then when it comes to the
354 voice pedagogy stuff, I've kind of been really interested in that in the last five or six years and
355 became good friends with a vocal coach in America, who is changing things in the barbershop
356 world, so actually using proper scientific language and stuff like that. And from my very much
357 left-brain brass band side that very much struck a chord with me. I've been working with him
358 a lot to try and learn as much as possible.

359
360 I think that's probably most of the stuff I can think of. I recently did the Vocal Health First Aid
361 course, which was worthwhile. It was nice for me: stuff that I had personally learned a lot
362 about on my own to now have an actual qualification in, so it was quite useful from that
363 standpoint.

Commented [EL54]: Leadership characteristics: Self-development

364
365 **RESEARCHER**

366 How would you describe your leadership style in the choirs that you currently run? And does
367 it vary between the groups?

368
369 **C2**

370 Yeah, it does vary a little bit and it has varied over time. So I've been with both of them for
371 roughly six years now. So the one that I joined, that was already a choir and they hired me
372 (the women's choir) – for these barbershop choirs a lot of competition tends to be involved in
373 a lot of this stuff. Every year there's a competition that we go to and we see who's the best
374 barbershop and it's not always the best environment for us and I think that they'd been beaten
375 down a lot in the past by this particular organisation of judges and were not very confident in
376 themselves. So I think when first there, I think, you know, how I was is probably very different
377 to how I am now. It was much more kind of forgiving of certain things, that I know if I know
378 that they can do that now, I'll immediately stop them and we'll do it again. But whereas before,
379 it would be a kind of softer approach and generally just trying to build as much confidence as
380 possible. Between then and now it's probably changed quite a bit.

Commented [EL55]: Leadership characteristics: Adaptable

Commented [EL56]: Leadership characteristics:
Understanding singers

Commented [EL57]: Leadership characteristics: Building
confidence

381
382 With the men's group, not quite as much of the confidence building was required. It started
383 off as a group of about eight or 10 of us and, most of us, we sang together at university. I
384 already knew them quite well in terms of who I was dealing with. I knew their characteristics

Commented [EL58]: Leadership characteristics: Adaptable

385 and I knew what I could get away with if I was going to say something in a rehearsal as well.
386 Although, now we're looking at it, I think, from that kind of eight that we had sort of six years
387 ago, we now have about 35 I think. We've had quite a big influx both during the pandemic
388 and afterwards as well - people joining on Zoom. Having to re-kind of-calculate how I'm going
389 to work with the group to make sure that if I've given any sort of advice and things like that,
390 they'll be taken in the right way.

Commented [EL59]: *Feedback:* Understanding your singers

391

392 **RESEARCHER**

393 What is your experience of the singers that come from outside of the barbershop world?

394

395 **C2**

396 I think what I've always tried to do is not place as much importance on it, as a lot of the other
397 barbershop choruses in the country would do. Actually it's all about making good music and
398 all the concerts that we do. The women's chorus, that I joined, they would do contests once
399 a year and that would pretty much be it. Maybe they'd do one other concert and I was like
400 hang on a minute, we're not just doing a year going to a contest where they don't really like
401 what you do and then that's it. Concerts is now our thing. And then, you know, they had lots
402 of success from that and it built their confidence: oh, hang on audiences actually really like
403 what we do. The organisation that the women's chorus belongs to have some very strange
404 things about it. Sometimes when you get to the convention, it's like a real onslaught to the
405 eyes with the number of sequins that are on stage and it's like the judges comment if the
406 dresses aren't all exactly the same. It's changing and it has been changing, which is good.
407 It's almost if you crossed a choir competition with a beauty pageant. I feel it's like what
408 probably it started out as 70 years ago and now gradually it's modernising. For a chorus of
409 women, mostly in their 20s and 30s in the centre of London, that doesn't really fly very well
410 with what they're used to in their daily lives. So it's always more difficult to introduce new
411 members to that.

Commented [EL61]: *Leadership characteristics:* Maintaining perspective

Commented [EL62]: *Leadership characteristics:* Building confidence

412

413 I think with the Men's Chorus, I think because we're quite drilled, well with both choruses we
414 are quite drilled about what we do in trying to achieve the best that we can. It's kind of, if they
415 come on that first rehearsal and kind of like that, they're probably going to get into that sort
416 of spirit driving forward to the different goals that we've got.

Commented [EL63]: *Leadership characteristics:* Managing culture

417

418

419 RESEARCHER

420 How long do you work on a song before a competition?

421

422 C2

423 I try not to do it for too long. We've done it a little bit longer for this next coming one, but
424 normally the contest is kind of May and then I'll start in January. But then I know a lot of other
425 choruses that will have the contest in May and they'll start the next set in June or July. But
426 it's very interesting because quite often a lot of these choruses keep repertoire for a lot longer,
427 rather than having like a, like an Easter concert where you get all your repertoire ready for
428 that concert and then once that concert is done that repertoire then moves aside, they build
429 up a repertoire of 10-15 songs and gradually replace a couple in and out over sort of a year,
430 which kind of creates new problems really to motivate people with songs that maybe they've
431 sung for over two years. You know, if there's a note that was wrong two years ago, it's not
432 probably going to have changed by this point. How I run it with my two is that we try and
433 change things up a lot more than the rest of our genre/style.

434

435 RESEARCHER

436 How do you motivate people at an early stage of learning a song when the deadline is several
437 months off? So if you start something in January, how do you motivate the choir to prioritise
438 it sooner rather than just before the contest?

439

440 C2

441 I think it's all about the culture of the choirs really. I think from six years ago when I started, it
442 is definitely not how it is now. We've been trying to build the culture and everyone is there
443 because they want to learn how to be a better singer, learn how to sing really well together
444 and put on the best performance they can and kind of trying to achieve that culture is kind of
445 how we then get there. So any new member that comes into the chorus, they're immediately
446 just enveloped by that culture. And they are then just like, okay, this is just how it's done. So
447 normally at the first rehearsal of the song, we would generally expect that most notes are
448 relatively correct. So they do a lot of the work at home beforehand, so at rehearsal we work
449 a lot more of the complicated stuff.

450

451 RESEARCHER

452 And how do they teach themselves at home - do they have rehearsal tracks?

Commented [EL64]: Leadership characteristics:
Motivating

Commented [EL65]: Leadership characteristics:
Programming skills

Commented [EL66]: Leadership characteristics: Managing
culture

Commented [EL67]: Leadership characteristics:
Motivating

453

454 **C2**

455 Yeah, we use lots of the rehearsal track sort of stuff. It's very, very popular in barbershop -
456 there are a lot of people that don't read music – even in these choirs that are at a higher level,
457 probably a quarter of the choruses don't read music at all. They just use these tracks and
458 follow along in their scores, so yeah, quite a vital resource, really. It is making sure that the
459 tracks are good enough quality as well because generally that kind of reflects in how they
460 then sing it in rehearsals. But we've managed to find people that make really good ones - we
461 get them made for the songs that we're doing.

462

463 **RESEARCHER**

464 So in thinking about your role of leading a choir, whether in rehearsal or in performance, or
465 in those moments in between, please can you describe all the different skills you need to be
466 able to do that effectively.

467

468 **C2**

469 I think kind of the basic one, I think is good vocal pedagogy skills and the thing that I've really
470 found over the last five or six years is that that is just so important. And something that I just
471 wished was the case when I'd been in choirs beforehand, being told all sorts of different ways
472 to sing, all sorts of different ways to do things that weren't particularly great for my voice. But
473 actually now understanding how things work, that is probably the fundamental thing that
474 underpins both the choirs that I work with, and I'm constantly thinking along that sort of thing,
475 of the vocal pedagogy being really important to us. Because the number of times that we've
476 been told stuff in the past that is just complete nonsense. And you know, it maybe works for
477 like half the singers and then half the singers it doesn't. We really try to push forward and get
478 the choruses really interested in it as well. So a lot of them are now really into it and there are
479 lots of people that have been reading on their own time about vocal pedagogy stuff. We've
480 got lots of scientists in the choruses. And I think they kind of like that matter of fact stuff about
481 it. So that is one really important thing I think. I think that particularly in the world that I'm in
482 in the barbershop world choral directors are just thrown in there because their choral director
483 has moved onto somewhere else and no one else was there. Someone just got shoved out
484 in front. And you know, they're just regurgitating the same stuff that they might have been
485 told before. So yeah, I think that's a particularly important thing for choirs to have, from the
486 leadership going all the way through the music team to have that understanding. And we've

Commented [EL68]: Leadership characteristics: Providing learning resources

Commented [EL69]: Leadership characteristics: Vocal pedagogy skills

487 quite often got our music teams to give one-to-one voice lessons with the members of the
488 choruses, so that it helps the music team get their knowledge level up and learn how to teach
489 it and coach it, as well as the members then also gaining from that coaching. So we sort of
490 try and spread it out throughout the chorus as much as possible.

491
492 Then, I think there's the actual kind of when it comes to the rehearsal, there's then the generic
493 teaching pedagogy of what should I be doing and how broach different things and make sure
494 that however you're explaining it is going to work well with the group that you're in front of.

495 Like the choirs I work with now, I can very much be myself and I can use my sense of humour
496 and different things like that and you know, if something's gone wrong, I can almost make a
497 slight joke out of it because I know that they will know themselves that they've got something
498 wrong. And then not in a harsh way, but you know, there's maybe a little bit of sarcasm. In
499 front of another group that I've just met that day, there's absolutely no way I'm going to do
500 that. Because if you say anything negative, you've lost them for 15 minutes. I think knowing
501 the group that you're with and how they best respond to you. And then also knowing the
502 basics of teaching when you've got a new group in front of you. I do a fair amount of going to
503 different barbershop choruses and quartets, so making sure that you get a good rapport with
504 them. So rapport with the group and how to then teach them is probably really important.

505
506 And then during the actual rehearsals themselves, making sure that you're, I try and think of
507 myself more of a coach than an actual director within the rehearsal. So that quite often I won't
508 actually be directing the songs in rehearsal. I'll just kind of be standing there or sat down. I'll
509 start them off and then particularly if it's in tempo, they just go. If they are not quite in tempo,
510 then a really loud metronome, so I'm not having to perform with them. Once I'm directing
511 them, then it is much more of the performance is happening. And we kind of have to switch
512 off learning mode and now it is just singing it, how we know to sing it and how we best perform
513 it. So we'll have a lot of the rehearsal of me coaching and then towards the end of it, we might
514 run some of the repertoire where I'll be directing and so that we have that kind of
515 differentiation between learning time and performing time. And then sometimes, learning to
516 perform time as well - the emotional stuff around the song. And then when it comes down to
517 performance, I think I do my best to not be in that learning mode. Just as much as I don't
518 want the chorus in it, I mustn't be in it as well. I mustn't be thinking critically anymore. I must
519 then be one of the performers as well because that's going to get the best performance out
520 of the choir. So those are some of the things.

Commented [EL70]: Leadership characteristics: Generic teaching skills

Commented [EL71]: Leadership characteristics: Sense of humour

Commented [EL72]: Leadership characteristics: Understanding singers

Commented [EL73]: Leadership characteristics: Building rapport

Commented [EL74]: Leadership characteristics: Adaptable

521
522 **RESEARCHER**
523 When do you hear a mistake and leave it and when do you hear a mistake and correct it?
524

525 **C2**
526 I think it will be one of the things depending on what I'm doing at the time. If I've got my focus
527 on one thing, I'm going to try and keep all the things that I'm stopping them for within the
528 realm of that thing that I'm looking at. So if I'm particularly looking at vowels and diphthongs,
529 if I maybe hear someone get a slightly wrong note at some point or a slightly wrong rhythm,
530 I'll note it down for later in the back of my head, but for now I want the singers to be thinking
531 about this one thing. In a two and a half or three-hour rehearsal we will tend to do a minimum
532 of 45 minutes of warm-up towards an hour, which covers the generic warm-up stuff, but also
533 quite often the first 10 minutes might be left to the individuals to do their individual warm-up,
534 then we kind of come together and rather than warm-up, we call it vocal technique. We might
535 do the same exercise over and over and very much a specific vowel focus one week and
536 work on that stuff. We might have some other focus another week thinking about the
537 resonance space and laryngeal height and stuff like that. But whatever exercise we're doing
538 we'll keep one focus in that exercise. We're only thinking about one thing at a time. So that
539 we can get better at that one thing and then move on to another one thing, so that gradually
540 when we come to then singing and working on the songs, our defaults are better.

541
542 **RESEARCHER**
543 In the vocal technique session, are you simply using exercises or are you talking about things
544 anatomically as well?
545

546 **C2**
547 Yeah, we talk through things anatomically. The coach, that I mentioned before that we fly
548 over from the States at least once a year, very much talks in that way. And we've very much
549 decided that we're going to completely adopt that whole approach and just get the singers
550 aware of it. And again, they seem to really enjoy it. And, you know, we're going into as much
551 detail as we think is necessary and that we know. We've still got plenty to learn ourselves
552 working in these choruses.

553
554

Commented [EL75]: *Feedback:* Singular focus

Commented [EL76]: *Feedback:* Understanding when to correct

Commented [EL77]: *Leadership characteristics:* Vocal pedagogy skills

Commented [EL78]: *Leadership characteristics:* Focused

Commented [EL79]: *Leadership characteristics:* Singer development

555 **RESEARCHER**

556 How much practice do you think your singers do in between rehearsals?

557

558 **C2**

559 I think there's quite a lot of them that do a fair amount. Everyone's luckily on board and part
560 of our audition process is probably relatively strange, maybe in comparison to others. So we
561 have a rough four or five- week process for the audition. And first you'd come and see whether
562 you like it or not, and you know, if someone kind of likes the idea they are probably at least
563 slightly motivated to be where we kind of want them to be. And then the second week is
564 having a one-to-one voice lesson with their section leader, so they understand from word go
565 that they need to put in work on their own voice outside of the rehearsal to make this stuff
566 work. Then they'll learn one of the pieces that we're currently singing to then sing in a quartet
567 as part of their audition. They sing their part on their own with the other three section leaders
568 normally and then rather than just "Have they got the notes right?", on week one of the quartet
569 we give more coaching and then we're kind of expecting the week afterwards for them to
570 have thought about some of it, most of it is stuff that takes years to actually really kind of iron
571 out. But actually it's more looking for the drive to learn and by auditioning in that way, when
572 we give a new song to the chorus, all of the members because they get into the chorus by
573 having that drive, they've got that drive when it comes to new songs and learning stuff out of
574 rehearsals. So they tend to be pretty good at that sort of stuff and there are definitely guys
575 that spend hours and hours outside of rehearsals themselves.

Commented [EL80]: Leadership characteristics: Managing culture

576

577 **RESEARCHER**

578 How do they know what to practise?

579

580 **C2**

581 In terms of rehearsal, we have someone every week that takes notes of the rehearsal and
582 we use Slack to put all our notes and stuff in. We have all the different channels – we've got
583 a rehearsal notes channel. So every week someone puts in all of the rehearsal notes from
584 that rehearsal and we put the rehearsal recordings underneath. And then if someone's not
585 there, or they want to go back on something, they've got everything there for them. But this
586 has taken six years to build. This definitely didn't start like this.

Commented [EL81]: Leadership characteristics: Communication

587

588

589 RESEARCHER

590 And your section leaders - is that who you mean when you refer to the music team?

591

592 C2

593 So we have sections leaders plus normally at least a couple of others, either as an assistant
594 director or things like that. And they've generally got different job focuses as well within what
595 they're doing as well as their section stuff or they might just be section. And then we have
596 people in charge of kind of performance stuff as well, so looking at the emotion behind the
597 music and making sure that we have an emotional plan behind the piece for when we're
598 singing it. It's taken six years to build, but we think we're finally getting towards the kind of
599 level that we want to sing at. It has always been our aim to be one of the best choirs we can
600 be and it's taken us, you know, the time to get there. And we think we're finally settling into a
601 good sort of rhythm now.

602

603 RESEARCHER

604 What do you think the balance should be between praise and criticism in an average
605 rehearsal?

606

607 C2

608 I think it probably stems from the fact that I work with three to seven year olds during the day,
609 that praise works best and I'm well aware of that. So I'm probably geared more towards that
610 in how I work with them. I'm always asking for what I want and how to get what I want, never
611 what I don't want, unless it's something that was really obviously silly and then maybe I will
612 sort of make a joke about it, as I said earlier, and they'll respond well. But yeah, generally if
613 something's gone well, make sure you say it and I think it's one of those things that I'm not
614 sure that I always do as well as I would like to. And quite often something good happens and
615 I'm just like, that's what it should be and I don't say anything, but it is making sure that actually,
616 every time something good is happening it doesn't matter what age we're working with, they
617 like it when they're told that they've done a good job. Even if it's sometimes completely
618 irrelevant to the thing that we're working on. But maybe the basses did something particularly
619 good that I knew they were working on a couple of weeks ago and then suddenly it was great
620 this week: "Oh by the way basses, that was amazing". So that you get that kind of constant
621 feeling of knowing that they're actually making progress. Again it stems back to the vocal
622 pedagogy stuff. I feel like if I'm speaking in a language that is very matter of fact to the chorus,

Commented [EL82]: Leadership characteristics: Directing expression

Commented [EL83]: Leadership characteristics: Delegation

Commented [EL84]: Feedback: Positive feedback

Commented [EL85]: Feedback: Use of humour

Commented [EL86]: Feedback: Positive feedback

Commented [EL87]: Feedback: Praise for corrected issue

623 it's much easier for me to give criticism, because it's kind of like, well, "I think actually, we can
624 have a slightly different tongue position on this vowel sound". It's not saying "You sang that
625 vowel badly". What can I do to make things better? So always looking at what can we do
626 rather than what we did.

Commented [EL88]: *Feedback:* Actionable advice

627
628 I think it's dependent on the group as well. The choruses I direct are desperate to know what
629 things they did wrong and how to fix it. They are much happier when I'm telling them how to
630 fix it, but if I'm working with a group that is much more coming to sing for fun, they're not going
631 to want to be told half of the things that I'm telling the choirs that I'm conducting at the moment.
632 It's kind of a balance of knowing what the singers you're working with are after out of you as
633 the director, what do they want to get from you, they might actually want a more 50/50
634 approach because they want to learn more and then it's working out how you actually give
635 that to them. Yeah, but then there might be another one that are just there for the complete
636 fun of it and if they have got a 50/50 criticism to praise, it's not going to be so great for them.

Commented [EL89]: *Feedback:* Understanding singers

637
638 **RESEARCHER**

639 Do you think the balance of praise and criticism changes for the final rehearsal before a
640 performance or a competition?

641
642 **C2**

643 I hope so. I think so. I think generally, because we'll have worked on it for quite a good number
644 of months when we're getting towards a performance - the month before, we want to ditch all
645 of the technical stuff completely because we've got ourselves to this level of default and that's
646 how we're going to sing it. Now we need to really make music with it and actually connect
647 with the audience. So then the sort of lead up to things like that is actually how we really get
648 the audience connected with us. So it's a very different look at how we're making things
649 happen. You know, are we really in the song? So I'll be directing more, I'll probably be getting
650 someone else to coach, so we've got people that are our performance directors. They might
651 be out the front watching, making sure that we're really engaged and again, give ideas of how
652 we can stay engaged with the story.

653
654 For one of the competitions with the men's chorus, people were giving examples of important
655 moments in their life and how they connected that to the song. So one guy would come out
656 and he would say this is what this song means to me and we'd sing that song to them, so that

657 we're feeding off of that emotion from them and what they just told us and you know, it brings
658 a huge, cohesive, amazing atmosphere to the group and you get great friendships from it as
659 well. You know, because you're suddenly connected on such deep levels. It's more about
660 getting everybody together and on the same page rather than kind of making sure the
661 technique is exactly where it needs to be.

Commented [EL90]: Feedback: Prioritising

Commented [EL91]: Leadership characteristics: Connection

662
663 **RESEARCHER**

664 How much non-verbal feedback do you give, or do you think you give?

665
666 **C2**

667 Maybe I'll grab hold of my larynx, just like "Check that" or I'll just touch particular parts of my
668 face if I think there's tension there. Or if I want to make sure that their ribs are staying
669 expanded for as long as possible, I'll start holding on to my ribs. So I think that sort of stuff
670 with the technique side.

Commented [EL92]: Feedback: Non-verbal (positive)

671
672 **RESEARCHER**

673 When you give feedback to the group, how do you ensure that it targets the intended
674 recipients?

675
676 **C2**

677 Yes. Build a culture that you can tell the individual person.

Commented [EL93]: Feedback: Managing culture

678
679 **RESEARCHER**

680 In front of everybody?

681
682 **C2**

683 Yes. It was really hard to build and it took a long time. But generally, again, because of this
684 attitude of everybody wants to do the right thing. If there's maybe a person slightly off, I've
685 built a culture I think where I can say "Your tongue tension might be causing something in
686 there that's not quite working with the rest of the section. Okay, let's see if I can deal with it."

Commented [EL94]: Feedback: Actionable advice

687
688 If there are people that I know that are more sensitive, I won't do it. I'll wait until a break or
689 wait until I do a one-to-one lesson with them and then fix it then. So it's again knowing the

690 personalities within the chorus, but also having the culture that means quite often I can just
691 say to someone "You're slightly sharp on that note", because they want to know if it's them.

Commented [EL95]: *Feedback:* Understanding singers

Commented [EL96]: *Feedback:* Diplomatic

692
693 If it's another group? I would not have the same answer. Yeah. I'd be a lot more tactful about
694 it, I'd be really careful about how I go about that. But I think the whole kind of philosophy of
695 what we've done with these guys is to build a culture that means we can work in a way that's
696 going to be best for everybody. And that everybody buys into that. Every time we kind of think
697 of some new thing that we're going to do, we will have had some sort of big chorus round
698 discussion about it, being like we think this might be a good thing to do, do you agree? And
699 then we'll talk about it. And generally, the idea is that we want to be better. So yeah, we could
700 do that.

Commented [EL97]: *Feedback:* Managing culture

701
702 We also have an assessment system as well that we've been doing over the last couple of
703 years, which is that they have to sing their part off-music recorded at home. And then the
704 section leader checks that they're singing all the right notes and rhythms and words. So again,
705 if there's one person that's just constantly singing the same wrong note, I know that before
706 we go to a performance that's going to be picked up by the assessment system. I might not
707 have to make that exchange in rehearsal as well.

Commented [EL98]: *Feedback:* Establishing/utilising processes

708
709 **RESEARCHER**

710 When does the assessment happen in the process of learning a song?

711
712 **C2**

713 It depends on the song and the kind of timescale that we have on the song. So we'll look up
714 when the performance of the song is, when we kind of expect in rehearsal for them to be
715 singing without music and then we work back from that. Generally, depending on the
716 complexity of the song, it will be maybe roughly five to six weeks that we're expecting them
717 to have sent their first recording. Some guys will do it before we've even started singing the
718 song in chorus because they've loved that song. From that point onwards in rehearsals if you
719 haven't been marked as ready in rehearsals you have to sit out of that song until you've been
720 marked as ready in rehearsals so that you don't impact the learning for the rest of the chorus.

721
722 This took a bit of persuading. After the first couple of songs that we tried it with, we'd have
723 six people singing and the rest of the chorus sat in the pews just like we haven't done it yet.

724 But then I would then be like okay, this is now my chance to show what I can do with six
725 singers that know this song really well. And rather than be like you didn't learn this song, so
726 we can't do it, I'm teaching these six people and putting most of my energy in that rehearsal
727 into that. So they're seeing like, oh, hang on, we can do that if we've learned the song properly
728 in time, and now we've got a much smoother sort of thing with it. People get the system a lot
729 more and are on board more quickly with it.

730

731 **RESEARCHER**

732 How do you approach the content of that final piece of advice that you give to a choir before
733 they go out to perform?

734

735 **C2**

736 It'll never be anything to do with how can we sing this better. Normally, we try and focus a lot
737 on singing the emotion of the song and things like that. It will normally be something along
738 those lines. Before a contest it will be pretty chilled: we'll do exactly the same vocal warm-up
739 routine, but without any you do this thing, we'll just sing along. Then we'll get into the song
740 and then maybe we'll talk about the song and what it means. When we did the thing of having
741 one of the members talk about the song each time, before our performance in the competition
742 I then did my one. So then when we went out on stage, I was in front of them directing having
743 just told my story for it. Just before our performance, we want to somehow create some sort
744 of cohesion as a unit, some sort of togetherness, it's going to be some sort of special moment
745 of actually connecting with the audience and with each other. So finding ways of doing that,
746 I think is probably what we'll try and do generally.

Commented [EL99]: *Feedback:* Pre-performance feedback

747

748 **RESEARCHER**

749 And when you do competitions are they always in the same venue?

750

751 **C2**

752 In the barbershop ones, they kind of move between like a couple of different venues. Always
753 really horrible to sing in. They're really dead acoustics and it's not the best. We try and
754 rehearse in a deader—, it's a church, but it's relatively dead in terms of what they hear as
755 individuals, so that we're rehearsing in the worst place to sing in. So then we perform
756 hopefully in places that are nicer to sing in. And sometimes if we really feel that the rehearsal

Commented [EL100]: *Feedback:* Connection

757 room is slightly too nice to us, we'll try and find another dead rehearsal room to hire out for a
758 week that's really bad, so that we can get that feeling because normally you can see the
759 panic across people's faces if they've been rehearsing somewhere that's very easy to sing in
760 and they're suddenly on a really dead stage. The technique is the same. Might sound different
761 because the acoustics are different. You've just got to do exactly the same as what we
762 normally do.

Commented [EL101]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Acoustics

763
764 I will try and practice every bit that we can. Maybe we'll get them to run on the spot for 30
765 seconds, then walk in, just anything that's potentially going to throw them off so that they've
766 then experienced being thrown off and singing the song. We try all sorts.

767

768 RESEARCHER

769 One final question: what sort of feedback do you give mid-performance?

770

771 C2

772 I try not to give any because if I'm doing what I've told them I'm going to do, then I'm going to
773 be in the song, I'm going to be in the emotional sphere of the song as well. If they see
774 something where I've gone out and I've heard something, I'm out of the song and that's going
775 to move them out of the song. So whatever happens I try my best not to give anything away.
776 Normally my eyes will twitch and some guy will notice. It's difficult to turn that side off, but as
777 much as possible, I will try and turn that side off. And just be a part of the experience with
778 them, rather than at that point being the educator, I'm actually just one of the people
779 performing.

Commented [EL102]: *Feedback:* No feedback given

780

781 And in some of the songs I'll go into the actual chorus itself and will sing with them and not
782 direct. I told them I was going to do it the week before one contest: "How are we going to
783 know when to come off?" and I was like "You'll just have to find out when we get there." And
784 we all came off together and it ended up being fine. But you know, things like that, rather than
785 me being this extra part of the picture being at the front waving my arms, I'm actually part of
786 what is being performed as well. So I'll try not to give anything, even though I imagine I do
787 give things away. And if it's in the interval of a concert I will just be positive because there's
788 no point.

Commented [EL103]: *Feedback:* Positive feedback

789

790

791 **RESEARCHER**

792 That was my last question, but please can I ask you, would you say your gesturing mid-
793 performance is more beating time or more emotional?

794

795 **C2**

796 This is probably one of the things that I practise the most myself. My training as a conductor
797 is with a baton and it's specifically gesture and that is what it is. With this more kind of digging
798 into the emotion, I have to sometimes I do need to give very specifically the gesture of the
799 song – it'll be planned. I've now started writing it on my scores in another pen over the top
800 what am I going to be doing at these moments, so that what I'm doing with my hands and
801 how I'm practising that, as well as giving the downbeat, as well as bringing them off is also
802 something that works musically with what we're doing as well. And generally trying to keep
803 everything as small as possible and kind of allow my body and my face to give the kind of
804 underlying message of the song, so that rather than me giving them that stuff with my hands
805 because they don't get that as singers because if they do that back the audience is lost. I'm
806 at least trying to be as similar to them as possible, I guess.

807

808 **RESEARCHER**

809 This has been so amazing. Thank you so very much.

810

811 - End of interview -

Commented [EL104]: Leadership characteristics:
Conducting/gesturing skills

812 **C3 Interview – 30 November 2021 2pm**

813

814 **RESEARCHER**

815 Can I start by asking you to describe the choirs that you currently conduct?

816

817 **C3**

818 Okay, so I lead one choir and we are a community choir – unauditioned. We do rock and pop,
819 contemporary music to backing tracks. And before COVID we had about 80, at the moment
820 we've got about 60.

821

822 **RESEARCHER**

823 And can you confirm the details of any formal music education you've had, whether that's
824 lessons, exams, courses, etc.

825

826 **C3**

827 I don't have much on the formal side. So I've always done singing since I was little - I was in
828 theatre and various things. I did a foundation degree in music performance back in 2009, so
829 when I was around 30. It was a two-year course, I was already starting a choir in that time. I
830 did a year of that and it was great. I was the only vocalist on the course. I worked with a
831 vocalist, [name of vocalist], and I basically had one- to-ones each week, so that was fantastic.
832 By the second year of that degree, I was teaching four choirs and then became pregnant with
833 my son. So unfortunately, I couldn't complete it. But I did most of that and those contacts: the
834 teachers were mostly my age, so I still work with them sometimes today, so that's been great.
835 What else have I done? Obviously learning on the job. I've done various online courses. I'm
836 actually signed up to do a new Teach Voice course in the new year.

837

838 **RESEARCHER**

839 How much would you say that education versus experience has contributed to your
840 proficiency as a conductor?

841

842 **C3**

843 Both are really important. For me doing contemporary vocals, my time doing the foundation
844 degree, even though I didn't manage to complete the whole thing, just learning more about
845 formal techniques and things like that was massive for me. It depends on what kind of choir

Commented [EL105]: Leadership characteristics: Self-development

846 you're running. I mean, if you're obviously working with scores and doing *Messiah*, you're
847 going to need a great deal of music theory. But I think you could have all that theory in the
848 world, but the experience is so important because what you're doing when you're running
849 choirs is 90% managing people: so lots of different characters often, depending on the size
850 of your choir.

Commented [EL106]: *Leadership characteristics*: People management

851
852 When myself and my business partner started [a choir resources organisation] all those years
853 ago, we felt there wasn't much out there for people going out running community choirs.
854 They're not always trained and they don't always have a degree in music. Often we know
855 that people fall into running choirs: they've been in that choir and they need a new leader and
856 they end up getting roped in. They're not always trained and they don't always have a degree
857 in music.

858
859 **RESEARCHER**

860 How would you describe your leadership style in the choir that you currently run?

861

862 **C3**

863 I think I've spent many years making it be me and I think that's taken time. There's a huge
864 amount of imposter syndrome, I think that is very common, like in anything when we start out.
865 Maybe particularly for women. I don't know. I think it affects everybody. So I think one of my
866 major styles is that I'm really me when I'm up there now. I've done it for 10 years. It's definitely
867 me you're seeing up there. And I try to be friendly. I'm not too firm, but then I always, you
868 know, we are going to get on with the rehearsal. We need to get through stuff and I'll make
869 sure that happens. I've learned to be able to laugh at myself sometimes. You know, if I make
870 a mistake, I'm not going to try "Oh, well I meant that". You know, it's just "Oh yeah, you caught
871 me out", you know, that kind of stuff. And just having a sense of humour. I think you have to
872 have a sense of humour running a community choir.

Commented [EL107]: *Leadership characteristics*: Authentic

Commented [EL108]: *Leadership characteristics*: Friendly

Commented [EL109]: *Leadership characteristics*: Rehearsal management

Commented [EL110]: *Leadership characteristics*: Sense of humour

873
874 **RESEARCHER**

875 And what sort of culture do you try to build in your choir?

876

877 **C3**

878 A real community feel. We live in a small village, well I say a small village - we've got 5000
879 people in our village. We've got an old-fashioned village green where a lot of events take

880 place. So it's a real community feel to it. We now rehearse in our community centre, so we
881 really feel at the centre of everything. So it's really that kind of community spirit that is really
882 important to us. And there's so many, it's lovely. We all feel like we know each other so well,
883 I think and there's lots of other friendship groups and book clubs and things that have sprung
884 from the choir. Some of them go off and do music sessions at, you know, care homes and
885 things, not at the moment, but care homes and things like that. So yeah, just that sort of
886 community really.

887
888 **RESEARCHER**

889 And in thinking about your role in leading a choir whether in rehearsal or performance, or
890 indeed those moments in between, please can you describe all the different skills that you
891 need to be able to do that effectively.

892
893 **C3**

894 Okay, so let's go with the music first. So you need to have, you know, decided on your pieces
895 well in advance, got everything ready so that you're not springing new songs on your singers
896 two weeks before performing and that kind of thing. So just being really aware. So I think
897 being a planner is really important as the first one, so that you're mapping out your season,
898 you know where you're going with it and then you can take things out or add them as needs
899 be. So I think being a planner is really important.

900
901 Knowing your parts, not sort of running in last minute, not underprepared. There's nothing
902 worse. It feels awful. So just being really sure of what you're teaching.

903
904 What are the skills? I go back to what I said before about being yourself. It's, it's really, it's
905 very easy I think when you've got to stand in front of a room of people to start doubting
906 yourself and feel like everyone knows more than me and all those thoughts that go on, so I
907 found trying to be present is a really important skill and not worrying about what I'm about to
908 do or what I've just done, just being present in whatever exercise or song I'm doing at that
909 moment. And just being myself and learning that's okay, and there's so many different choirs
910 of different styles and different leaders, there's always a choir for somebody to go to. If you
911 concentrate on making your choir as just being genuine, just being you, then the people that
912 like that will come and find you and that's kind of like your tribe and that works well.

913

Commented [EL111]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Managing culture

Commented [EL112]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Programming skills

Commented [EL113]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Organisational/planning skills

Commented [EL114]: *Leadership characteristics:* Score
understanding

Commented [EL115]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Rehearsal management

Commented [EL116]: *Leadership characteristics:* Focused

Commented [EL117]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Authentic

914 What else would I say? Just connecting with people is important - that ability to connect with
915 your singers, with your audience. I think that's a really important skill as a choir leader.

Commented [EL118]: Leadership characteristics:
Connection

917 Being organised timewise: so starting on time, finishing on time, keeping an eye during the
918 rehearsal, so that you're not spending too much time on one thing or another, but also having
919 the courage to just think oh, okay, I need to spend a bit more time on that today and maybe
920 making adjustments as you go along.

Commented [EL119]: Leadership characteristics:
Rehearsal management

Commented [EL120]: Leadership characteristics:
Adaptable

922 **RESEARCHER**

923 What about gesturing? How important do you think that is?

925 **C3**

926 To have some basic grounding in conducting I think really helps. I did a course with ABCD
927 years ago. And then we offer it in within [our choir resources organisation]: we have some
928 courses in there. Even just having the basic beat pattern because what I found is when I
929 learned that, my choir could follow it so much more easily than a random waving of arms. I
930 mean, sometimes it becomes random. I think doing rock and pop is slightly different. I know
931 when I was on the ABCD course you were sort of taught to stand very still on that, but when
932 you're doing pop sometimes and moving around, that kind of doesn't feel right. So finding
933 your style, but I think if you've got a basic understanding.

Commented [EL121]: Leadership characteristics:
Conducting/gesturing skills

935 There are other skills, so being quite organised when you're planning your, your season, I
936 think it's quite smart to get people to help with those kind of jobs as well. We have some
937 members of the choir that are very keen and they will help with those kinds of things from,
938 you know, signing people in when they come and various things. So I think a smart choir
939 leader can also delegate, yes doesn't always have to feel they have to do every single thing
940 themselves. Yeah, a lot of different roles really.

Commented [EL122]: Leadership characteristics:
Organisational/planning skills

Commented [EL123]: Leadership characteristics:
Delegation

942 **RESEARCHER**

943 Are there any particularly notable traits that you think a good conductor has?

945 **C3**

946 Empathy. That's quite a good one. That old phrase: lead the choir in front of you, not the one
947 in your head. So yeah, just thinking of things from my singers' points of view. You know, are

Commented [EL124]: Leadership characteristics: Empathy

948 we going to do all brand new songs and they've got to memorise them all and how much time
949 are they going to have to do that. So just understanding and just in a rehearsal, so you might
950 have thought something would be easy for them to pick up, but it's not so we've got to think
951 okay, well, we need, I need to re-adjust how I'm doing that rather than "Oh, you know, they
952 should be getting this". Yeah. So having a bit of empathy is really, really important. Yeah, that
953 would be my number one.

954
955 **RESEARCHER**

956 In thinking about giving feedback to a choir, what do you think the balance should be between
957 praise and criticism in an average rehearsal?

958
959 **C3**

960 Well, I do think if you just criticise, that's probably not going to be very productive is it. It's the
961 inclusive language I like – the "we". So rather than what did you do there? What did we think
962 about that? And that usually tells them that there's something to think about. And of course
963 it's difficult sometimes because if you just said, altos, bar something something or that section
964 was a bit flat, unless you're dealing with experienced singers they're not going to know how
965 to fix that. So instead, I might say something like, "Right let's try that section again - let's make
966 sure we're standing nice and tall, a little lift in the face." And so I'll give tips rather than
967 criticism, as it were. So yes, always trying to be positive with that. Yeah, but I think the
968 inclusive language is really important. So you've not got an "us and them" kind of scenario.
969 You're all in it together. You're a team.

970
971 It's a tricky balance, isn't it? You can overpraise so the praise doesn't mean anything. You
972 can say everything's great, when it's not. I think my singers know when something is coming
973 together because I tend to go "Yes!". I found it quite hard this term coming back because
974 where people are spaced, it's been harder because they're having to work more
975 independently and some are a bit nervous about that. And there's quite an upbeat song we've
976 been doing and it's only in the last couple of weeks, I've really felt the energy come together.
977 So I think they really knew I liked it because I was like "Yes!" (with a fist pump and smile).
978 Whereas before, I might have been "Okay, that was good we'll keep working on that." It's a
979 fine balance, isn't it? Because if you say everything's great, no one will know when it actually
980 is.

981

Commented [EL125]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Adaptable

Commented [EL126]: *Feedback:* Inclusive approach

Commented [EL127]: *Feedback:* Actionable advice

Commented [EL128]: *Feedback:* Issues with overpraising

Commented [EL129]: *Feedback:* Positive feedback (high
magnitude)

Commented [EL130]: *Feedback:* Non-verbal (positive)

Commented [EL131]: *Feedback:* Issues with overpraising

982 And thinking about why are my singers here. So, okay, you might have *The Sixteen* sitting in
983 front of you and it's a professional set-up, but most of us are dealing with a community choir
984 where people come for a hobby, so I think we need to bear that in mind as choir leaders as
985 well. And we have certain expectations and I like to give a little email out after rehearsals:
986 this is what we covered if you missed it, we'll be doing this next week. They've got rehearsal
987 tracks, so it's not like I don't care where we're at, but at the same time I'm acknowledging
988 they are there as a hobby and so it should be fun and enjoyable. And I think if it is fun and
989 enjoyable, you're going to get a better sound anyway.

Commented [EL132]: *Feedback*: Empathy

991 RESEARCHER

992 Do you think that changes for the last rehearsal before a performance in terms of the praise
993 and criticism balance?

995 C3

996 For the last one before? Yeah, that's tricky, isn't it? (*laughs*). I was thinking of it like going up
997 a hill (*indicating with ascending hand*) when you're learning and it gets close to performance
998 and you're still thinking "Oh, no" and then suddenly, you'll be up there and "yes" (*indicating*
999 *the "top of the hill" with hand in high position*). Yeah, so I wouldn't want to be loading too
1000 much criticism on my singers because it's just going to be counterproductive. Yeah and I
1001 suppose I take on a lot of that responsibility myself. It is my responsibility as choir leader to
1002 get my singers ready. Yeah, and if maybe one or two aren't-, but if there's a real feeling that
1003 most people aren't, then I've gone wrong somewhere.

Commented [EL133]: *Leadership characteristics*:
Providing learning resources

Commented [EL134]: *Leadership characteristics*: Creating
a positive experience

Commented [EL135]: *Feedback*: Pre-performance feedback

Commented [EL136]: *Leadership characteristics*: Taking
responsibility

1005 RESEARCHER

1006 How do you handle criticism from choir members?

1008 C3

1009 Yeah. And this links back to experience. I think when you're new and you're starting out,
1010 criticism hits really hard. I think it can really derail people and the imposter syndrome that
1011 goes with that. So criticism if it's coming at me in the rehearsal... I'm very lucky with my choir,
1012 actually, I have to say. If the criticism is coming in rehearsal and it isn't relevant to what I'm
1013 teaching right then and there, I might say "Well, thank you for that. I'll come back to that or
1014 come and see me at the break" or something like that. It's sort of not getting derailed in
1015 rehearsal, which can be quite tricky. Always just being polite and diplomatic. I try to speak or

Commented [EL137]: *Leadership characteristics*:
Polite/being rude

1016 phone people if there's an issue, rather than emails going back and forth, which I think the
1017 tone can sometimes get misconstrued. And you'd never know who's resending what and, you
1018 know, so always prefer to talk to people if we can. Yeah, so I think it's a tough one for choir
1019 leaders because you can't have a room full of people who are all going to agree at all times
1020 or like the same music or some people won't like a song. I used to get really freaked out about
1021 people not liking a song. Now I see it like a challenge and so many times I've taught a song
1022 and people have gone like "ugh", but by the end of it, they've come around and they really
1023 like it. So I think as long as you've planned things and you know why you're doing things, you
1024 can't go wrong.

1025

1026 **RESEARCHER**

1027 In terms of talking to choir members, how do you target the right choir members? You know
1028 if you can hear something's wrong, how do you make sure it is received by the right people?

1029

1030 **C3**

1031 Okay, so not individually. I wouldn't say "Sir, on row three, you're this and that." No, so I don't
1032 know if you've found this, but sometimes the more confident choir members often say, "Oh, I
1033 don't think we're getting this right at this section." You can't always hear actually as the leader
1034 at the front, you don't always get a sense of it. So what I would do is if I'm hearing something
1035 wrong I'm going to work with that section. I'm never going to single anybody out. Actually one
1036 of the greatest things choir singers can do working independently is get something wrong.
1037 And I always think that's a great thing, because it shows they're using their own initiative, and
1038 they'll learn and yeah, it's fine. So yeah, we certainly don't want that blame culture: "So and
1039 so in row five."

1040

1041 **RESEARCHER**

1042 And how do you know when to correct something or when to leave it for another day or hope
1043 for self-correction?

1044

1045 **C3**

1046 That's a good question. Yes. So depends. Sometimes if you're working on something and it's
1047 taking ages, you can feel that point where you're not getting any further in that session, I think
1048 we all sense it. So I might then come back to something and then in the meantime encourage
1049 them in my notes in my email or whatever, some specific learning on that section. I know if

Commented [EL138]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Communication

Commented [EL139]: *Feedback:* No individual feedback in
front of choir

Commented [EL140]: *Feedback:* Peer feedback

Commented [EL141]: *Feedback:* Managing culture

Commented [EL142]: *Feedback:* Change of focus/energy
required

1050 everyone goes away and actually really listens, it's going to improve. And then what I might
1051 also do is add some warm-ups that are going to work on that. Usually, that will see it right in
1052 the end.

Commented [EL143]: *Feedback:* Understanding when to correct

1053
1054 **RESEARCHER**

1055 How do you approach vocal technique?

1056

1057 **C3**

1058 I work as a singing teacher as well, so I'm really, really passionate about taking care of voices
1059 and am particularly conscious that I've got an older choir, so I want to help them look after
1060 their voices. I don't ever want them to walk out my choir feeling like they couldn't sing another
1061 note. So I always do a warm-up. We start with some stretching and gentle exercises. We
1062 always do very gentle scales or something with airflow just keeping tension out of everything.
1063 Then we'll do some technique-based work and always some kind of team building thing that
1064 will make everyone laugh. But I also finished with a cooldown, so if we're doing a big sing at
1065 the end, we don't just go "Right, see ya". So yeah, we always have a little cooldown which is
1066 a descending pattern of some sort, just to bring voices back to that kind of speaking place. I
1067 see they really enjoy that a lot, people close their eyes for that and it's really gentle at the
1068 end. I liken it to aerobics or dance or anything energetic, Zumba. You wouldn't go in and just
1069 do the biggest routine and then just go, you will always build up to it, get your big stuff done
1070 and then cool down and stretch at the end.

Commented [EL144]: *Leadership characteristics:* Vocal pedagogy skills

1071
1072 **RESEARCHER**

1073 How much non-verbal feedback do you think you use?

1074

1075 **C3**

1076 Non-verbal? Yeah. Yeah, I think I'm quite expressive. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, usually a smile or
1077 a concerned look (*head to side and mouth contorted, laughs*). Like I say, if something's gone
1078 really well: "Yay" (*with fist pump and smile*).

Commented [EL145]: *Feedback:* Non-verbal (negative)

Commented [EL146]: *Feedback:* Non-verbal (positive)

1079
1080 **RESEARCHER**

1081 Can you think of any examples of feedback that you've given that really stay in your memory?

1082

1083

1084 **C3**

1085 A bad one actually. Not a bad, that wasn't bad feedback. It was negative feedback that I had
1086 to give the choir and that was quite unusual for me and it's not a strong point of mine. I'd
1087 worked and worked to get this Christmas performance together as an outdoor one. I just felt
1088 like people weren't taking it seriously. And then we turned up and people, some people were
1089 actually holding sheets even though we are a choir that performs without them. And it was, it
1090 wasn't very good. You know, so I just felt like I had to say something. I put it very diplomatically
1091 and I was very polite and everything, but because I'd said it, everyone was like "Oh, no, we've
1092 disappointed Christine." But it never happened again.

Commented [EL147]: *Feedback*: Diplomatic

Commented [EL148]: *Feedback*: Polite/being rude

Commented [EL149]: *Feedback*: Negative feedback (high magnitude)

1093
1094 **RESEARCHER**

1095 How do you approach the content of the final piece of advice that you give to a choir before
1096 they go onstage?

1097

1098

1099 **C3**

1100 Always enjoy yourselves, relax, enjoy yourselves. We always do a little warm-up
1101 beforehand. And that is 99% focused on just getting people to move and to get some of that
1102 adrenalin shaken out a bit. I'm never gonna say stuff like "Don't forget your words". At that
1103 point, there's nothing you can do, but to say get out there. And if people look like they're
1104 enjoying themselves, of course, it's all gonna look better. Start well and finish well. The rest
1105 will all come together. I think we've learned that over the years I mean, we've had false
1106 starts where things have gone out of time, we just start again.

Commented [EL150]: *Feedback*: Pre-performance feedback

1107

1108 I think once we realise that the world doesn't fall in when we do that, it's fine. I think people
1109 are a little bit more resilient now. Well a lot more resilient now with the pandemic. We had a
1110 sound problem the other day and I didn't know if I'd have any sound to play my tracks for the
1111 whole rehearsal. So it was like, "Okay, how can I do this whole session a cappella?" Before I
1112 would have been in a real panic, but I was just like, it'll be fine. And actually, we did get the
1113 sound working, but yeah, I think we've just all, you know, there's so much going on in the
1114 world isn't there, that those things are not insurmountable.

Commented [EL151]: *Leadership characteristics*:
Maintaining perspective

1115

1116 **RESEARCHER**

1117 Did you Zoom during lockdown?

1118

1119 **C3**

1120 Yeah the whole time. We missed about one week. And our jobs as choir leaders became
1121 very different and that was about community 100% and loneliness. There are people in my
1122 choir that live alone, family miles away. So it was vital for them that we turned up each week.
1123 We did a quiz and we made sure we had a chat as well. So musically, it became much less
1124 about the music and more about that, that sense of community. But yeah, we carried on right
1125 through.

Commented [EL152]: Leadership characteristics:
Adaptable

Commented [EL153]: Leadership characteristics: Empathy

1126

1127 **RESEARCHER**

1128 And have you retained those elements, those chatty elements?

1129

1130

1131 **C3**

1132 We're not getting that in live rehearsals at the moment because we're not doing the social
1133 time from a safety point of view. There is a cafe in the centre where we rehearse and some
1134 are going off afterwards to sit there and talk, but we're not quite doing as much of that as we
1135 were. So Zoom was almost better for that. We probably got to know each other more on
1136 Zoom than we ever had.

1137

1138 The other thing about Zoom that is great. You can do Zoom sectionals very easily. You can
1139 bring in your altos on Zoom without having to physically organise an extra time and space.
1140 Yeah, so I know a lot of choir leaders are doing that. I think that that could work really well
1141 mid-season. If there's people struggling on things. Yeah, you could just do like 40 minutes
1142 with each section and you've got a lot more confident choir.

1143

1144 **RESEARCHER**

1145 This is my final question: what sort of feedback do you give post-performance?

1146

1147 **C3**

1148 Post-performance, I'm honest with myself about what I thought. I'm always positive with the
1149 choir afterwards and congratulating them. I mean, apart from the one that I told you about, I
1150 haven't really had an experience of a dreadful performance. So I'll always, if there was a

Commented [EL154]: Leadership characteristics: Self-
reflection

Commented [EL155]: Feedback: Post-performance
feedback

1151 highlight, I'll always really, yeah, talk about that. But yeah, it's not the time to sort of start "Well
1152 you did this, this and this and this wrong", you know.

1153

1154 **RESEARCHER**

1155 But would you ever glare at somebody mid-performance?

1156

1157 **C3**

1158 Probably not, I'd probably just keep that to myself.

1159

1160 **RESEARCHER**

1161 This is so kind of you to do this. I really appreciate your time. Thank you very much.

1162

1163 - *End of interview* -

1164 **C4 Interview – 30 November 2021 3:30pm**

1165

1166 **RESEARCHER**

1167 So I'd love to start by asking you to describe the choirs that you currently conduct.

1168

1169 **C4**

1170 There are three choirs at the cathedral: a choir of boys and adults, which gets broken down
1171 into two groups quite often to the boys and the adults. The majority of the adults are
1172 volunteers and some of them are students on scholarships. The girls' choir is directed
1173 separately. The boys and the girls are both there on a bursary basis, so essentially they're
1174 volunteer choristers as well. Additionally, away from the cathedral, I run a choral society of
1175 amateur singers as well.

1176

1177 **RESEARCHER**

1178 Please could you confirm details of any formal music education that you've had, whether
1179 that's lessons, exams, courses, etc.

1180

1181 **C4**

1182 I suppose the easiest things to say is that I hold the two organ playing diplomas of the Royal
1183 College of Organists and a music degree from Durham University, in addition to the things
1184 that I did in school alongside GCSE and A level music, my grades and things like that.

1185

1186 **RESEARCHER**

1187 And how much would you say that education versus experience has contributed to your
1188 proficiency as a conductor?

1189

1190 **C4**

1191 I think experience wins quite a lot simply because I've had no formal training as a conductor,
1192 but I've done an awful lot of work on the job - both either directing or watching other people
1193 and learning from that. And I believe - having been a student and also being a conductor now
1194 - that you can learn a lot by choosing what you want to take from others and what you decide
1195 you don't want to do as well.

1196

1197

1198 **RESEARCHER**
1199 How would you describe your leadership style in the choirs that you currently run? And does
1200 it vary between groups?

1202 **C4**
1203 Yes, it definitely varies between groups. I would notice the biggest difference between
1204 working with choristers as part of a group and working without them. Partly because the
1205 dynamic is changed and your cultural references change. It's much easier to conduct a
1206 rehearsal without the choristers because you can be slightly more direct to adults in a way
1207 that sometimes children need more explaining and nuanced language is more important.
1208 There's certainly a difference between when I'm directing the boys here or the opportunities
1209 I would get to direct the girls because of their age group.

1210
1211 That said there's a second difference there: at this cathedral the girls do two days a week
1212 regularly and also Sundays sort of every three weeks. And the boys are in five days a week,
1213 so the boys have a lot more experience, which means that dealing with the boys and dealing
1214 with the back row as well, we can take shortcuts which as well as being a time saver, there
1215 is a question of style because you can use language differently. And you know the way we
1216 would rehearse would often be for the boys particularly, but also with the back row that we
1217 could refer to something and we could talk it through without actually having to do it. If it's a
1218 choir that's less experienced in the doing, you end up having to give more examples or being
1219 more explicit about the thing you're referring to. Even with really mundane stuff, like if you're
1220 doing the psalms for the day, then if you're used to singing psalms for the day on a really
1221 regular basis I can be quite oblique with some of the references in order to save time. You
1222 know we have a half hour rehearsal before most services, so there's not a great deal of time
1223 to do things. But recently the [choral society] singers have sung evensong once at the
1224 cathedral and once at another church and a lot of these people have never sung evensong
1225 before in their lives. So we spent a lot of time just simply talking about what we were actually
1226 going to do, what order it comes in, and that changes your whole style and changes pace
1227 and I find it really interesting that I can talk to eight-year-old/nine-year-old boy choristers in a
1228 much more fast-paced, elevated, experienced way than dealing with a singer who's 60, but
1229 who's never sung evensong.

1230
1231

Commented [EL156]: Leadership characteristics:
Adaptable
Commented [EL157]: Leadership characteristics:
Understanding singers

Commented [EL158]: Leadership characteristics:
Understanding singers

Commented [EL159]: Leadership characteristics:
Understanding singers

1232 **RESEARCHER**

1233 In thinking about your role in leading choirs, whether in rehearsal or in performance, or indeed
1234 in those moments in between, please can you describe all the different skills that you need
1235 to be able to do that effectively.

1236
1237 **C4**

1238 I think one of the one of the overriding things you need to have is a decent grasp of what
1239 you've done already and when that was. I mean, depending on where you are in a rehearsal
1240 schedule if you're preparing something like concert work and you know what you have
1241 rehearsed already, so you're not wasting time in going over old ground. Having a really good
1242 overview, so that you know where you are, then of course, you're able to address areas of
1243 weakness, things that need work, so you need to be able to hold a really big scheme in your
1244 head. And that comes in really handy if you have to do something like the dreaded choral
1245 society three-hour rehearsal on the day of the concert.

1246
1247 Bucket loads of patience. Just to try and remember, you know, that you've got people who,
1248 you know, are at very different stages of learning. What's great about working with amateurs
1249 is you've got people who in their professional lives walk into a room with huge confidence
1250 and as soon as they open their music that gets put away. And one of the things I find myself
1251 telling choirs as light-hearted as is possible, but with a very strong, firm look on my face is
1252 that I'm better judged than they are to say how good they are. And you'll find a lot of people
1253 say, "Oh, I can't do this" or "I can't do that" because they can't do the whole thing. So:

1254 [Singer]: I can't sight read.

1255 [C4]: Okay, well, we're just sung that, did you get it played to you on the piano first?

1256 [Singer]: No.

1257 [C4]: Did you manage to sing it?

1258 [Singer]: Well, more or less.

1259 [C4]: Okay, so you can say read a bit?

1260 [Singer]: Well, yes okay.

1261

1262 And that's fine, but then you've got this times 50 or times 80 or times 100. And, you know,
1263 you know, if you've got a room full of people all at different stages, you've also got to be able
1264 to assess what's the best thing to do to keep them all occupied. Because you can't simply
1265 note bash through every rehearsal because the people who know what they're doing are

Commented [EL160]: Leadership characteristics:
Organisational/planning skills

Commented [EL161]: Leadership characteristics:
Rehearsal management

Commented [EL162]: Leadership characteristics: Patience

Commented [EL163]: Leadership characteristics:
Understanding singers

Commented [EL164]: Leadership characteristics: Empathy

Commented [EL165]: Leadership characteristics: People
management

1266 going to get bored, and then, you know, worst case scenario, they say "Actually, I'm going to
1267 find another choir." And one of the things that I find really satisfying about working with choirs,
1268 particularly working with amateurs is that you get to the end of a rehearsal process or a
1269 concert and someone says I've learned something, and with any luck, it was completely
1270 tangential to what you've actually been doing in the rehearsal.

1271
1272 When we shut down the [choral society] for Covid, we were about a week away from doing a
1273 concert. And we pulled the plug on that, we knew that wasn't going to happen and it took us
1274 a while to work out what to do. We started off having some social events and then I said
1275 "Look it would be really good to do some online sessions where we can actually work on
1276 those skills that people say they haven't got. So we'll work on sight reading, we'll work on
1277 how to look through a score, how to prepare yourself." And so you know, the ability to meet
1278 people where they are and work out how to help them get better, so that they're getting the
1279 most out of a rehearsal. And some very wise person said that "Rehearsals aren't about
1280 learning your own notes, they're about learning other people's notes." And there is a lot to be
1281 said for that. If you've got a choir full of people who can go home look at their own music and
1282 know how it goes. And I would say to people "If you do nothing else between one rehearsal
1283 and the next, what you can do is open that copy, look to see what does the music look like
1284 on the page." And because they weren't really following where they are they're trying to sing
1285 the soprano solo or something else. You know, the most fascinating part is being able to say
1286 to people you are a very fine chartered surveyor or author or housing inspector, whatever
1287 you do. Let me tell you that as a professional musician, I think you're a reasonable singer,
1288 you might not think that you are, but you're holding yourself up to an impossible standard.

1289
1290 And then having said that, I then have to remember to treat them the same way, which can
1291 be tricky because every conductor is thinking "What does this sound like in my head?" One
1292 of the great things about Covid is being able to work with them online preparing something
1293 and then singing it to a recording, so they could get a sense of having actually sung something
1294 with some other people. I couldn't hear a thing, I had no idea whether they were singing the
1295 right notes, the wrong notes, whatever. But people did find that that worked. So you know, I
1296 know that there are people who will walk into the [choral society] rehearsal tonight, they can
1297 open any of the copies we've got, they can look at something and sing it completely accurately
1298 the first time and I've got to still keep them engaged from 7:30 to 9:30, as well as the people
1299 who say "Can we hear it on the piano first?"

Commented [EL166]: *Leadership characteristics:* Singer development

1300

1301 I suppose the thing that continues to stimulate over one season to another season is that
1302 there is going to be new music and what new challenges is this going to throw up? Finding
1303 something that challenges them, getting them through, how do we approach this, did we get
1304 everybody hearing themselves as a singer, are they hearing other people? You've got to be
1305 able to deal with the problem in a room. Someone says "I can't hear the basses." How are
1306 you going to deal with that? You've got to look ahead to your rehearsal room. How does that
1307 differ from your concert venue? You've got all those other things. I mean, you've got to be a
1308 musician, you've got to be a stage manager. And then you know, all those other things that
1309 you might have to do like language coaching and what happens if you're a conductor and
1310 you're not actually a particularly confident speaker of German and the choir is singing in
1311 German. The list goes on.

1312

1313 **RESEARCHER**

1314 How important do you think gesturing is, as in beating time etc?

1315

1316 **C4**

1317 I don't think there's much that's more important. I think you can help people to learn all sorts
1318 of things, but there's a physical element of live performance that you can't pre-program if you
1319 like. I don't work as a rule with choirs that memorise music. I would find the idea terrifying.
1320 But potentially you can get the choir to do absolutely everything. And if you wanted to, and
1321 the choir was constant enough, you could train them to sing together without a conductor.
1322 But given that they're not that kind of a choir and even if I wanted them to learn a page of
1323 music off by heart, like say the last page of Monteverdi *Vespers* or the first entry of *Carmina*
1324 *Burana*, they can probably stretch to that. And we can tell them how they're going to sing it,
1325 what the volume is going to be, what they should be feeling, what they should think about
1326 communicating to the audience. But if you have to wait for half a moment, because you notice
1327 at the last minute that one of your players isn't quite on the right page or they're just fiddling
1328 with their bow or something, then that's the absolute crucial thing that you can do.

1329

1330 And as you would say to singers, "You've got all the information in the score that you could
1331 possibly want. If you're going to spend all your time looking at it and not looking at me, at
1332 least sing in time and listen to other people." But if they watch me then I get the chance to
1333 take the music beyond what's on the page. And so if we decide that we're going to just stretch

Commented [EL167]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Programming skills

Commented [EL168]: *Leadership characteristics:* Problem-
solving skills

Commented [EL169]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Acoustics

Commented [EL170]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Language coaching

Commented [EL171]: *Leadership characteristics:* Directing
expression

1334 a moment out, then I can do that. And I can only do that if they're watching, so my central
1335 direction to them is to watch me so that we can stay together and once we're together, we
1336 can make music as a choir. I might change my mind about dynamics, and that's great. And
1337 all those kinds of things, which would be extra. But if a choir sang all the right notes beautifully
1338 at the right dynamics, but they weren't together I think I would be fairly unmoved. And
1339 communication is the top-most way that we do that unanimously, unless the composer
1340 specifically dictates that it is like an aleatoric piece or they just want a kind of smudged ending.
1341 And there is a certain amount of, you know, adherence to our performance tradition, which
1342 says that we try and do things corporately. So the way the choir comes onstage, the way the
1343 choir stands and sits and the way it sings, we decide that we're going to do that together.
1344 That's our Western musical tradition. And so, you know, if I can get everybody working on
1345 the pulse, then that's not all I'm going to be showing them, but that's I think the most important
1346 thing.

Commented [EL172]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Conducting/gesturing skills

Commented [EL173]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Communication

Commented [EL174]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Conducting/gesturing skills

1348 RESEARCHER

1349 And what about vocal technique? How important is it for conductors to know and be able to
1350 disseminate that to choir members?

1352 C4

1353 I think it is hugely important. Say that you've got a choir that is singing as well as it possibly
1354 can and safely and healthily. But also up to a point I think it's very useful to be able to help
1355 someone if they've got a concern straightaway and it's something that you can remedy. If
1356 they've got an actual vocal issue, then, you know, send them away to a practitioner. But if
1357 someone is having trouble singing something and it's something that's you can help them
1358 with because it's a physiological issue, then I think that's enormously helpful.

Commented [EL175]: *Leadership characteristics:* Vocal
pedagogy skills

1360 It used to be the great tradition in churches and cathedrals that you started your training as
1361 an organist, you sat playing the organ, you watched what the choir was doing and then after
1362 a while, you stand in front of the choir and you conduct them and then when you retire, you've
1363 done absolutely no training in vocal production whatsoever. In some cases, leave it to a
1364 singing teacher, but the choir that I was in in the first half of the 90s had no singing lessons
1365 for some time, and we didn't sing badly, but they weren't separate singing lessons. We would
1366 have got vocal training and instruction, but on a very low-key level. And I think if you're going
1367 to get someone like [a vocal coach] in and she's brilliant with singers, then it is important to

1368 know how to further the work you do with her because there's just no point having a one-off
1369 session that you can never refer back to because you don't remember what she said. Or if
1370 you choose to go with a particular vocal coach as well, then you've got to be able to carry on
1371 with their methods and understand what they achieve.

1372
1373 There are conductors who know loads and loads and loads about how the voice works and
1374 can get really technical and some conductors who can get too technical and get totally hung
1375 up on the fact that their choir can produce a really, really healthy sound. But they can't actually
1376 sing the piece because they haven't spent any time looking at the dots. This is why, you know,
1377 I think we value people who are at the top of their game as animateurs and vocal coaches
1378 for choirs, as well as for singers, because you can bring them in. The choir has a great benefit
1379 of someone who comes alongside to give a totally different angle. And quite often they'll sing
1380 differently for a different person, which is no slight on their regular conductor. And I think
1381 sometimes there is a perception that, you know, we've got to get a vocal coach in because
1382 the conductor doesn't know what they're doing, but you wouldn't expect every person in any
1383 walk of life to be a specialist.

Commented [EL176]: *Leadership characteristics:* Vocal pedagogy skills

1385 RESEARCHER

1386 Are there any particularly notable traits that you think a good conductor has?

1387

1388 C4

1389 I'm trying to think how to make generalisations. I've worked with a couple of conductors who
1390 were able to make every single person in the room feel completely involved right from the
1391 beginning of a rehearsal or a concert simply with a gesture. In front of a choir of 100 people,
1392 you're not going to be thinking about each one of those individually, but everybody got the
1393 sense that they were included. I think the way that you put yourself at the disposal of a choir
1394 as its director. There are conductors who are there because they like being at the front and
1395 they like being important, but not as many as there used to be.

Commented [EL177]: *Leadership characteristics:* Conducting/gesturing skills

Commented [EL178]: *Leadership characteristics:* People management

1396
1397 But, you know, I think making sure that everyone who turns up to put effort in is going to feel
1398 that their effort has been acknowledged. I mean, you know, you don't expect to be individually
1399 acknowledged at the end of the concert in the chorus, but they turn up and need to feel that
1400 it was worth their while turning up. Because for amateur musicians, they're doing something
1401 that they might be good at, they might not be good at, they might not be very confident about

Commented [EL179]: *Leadership characteristics:* People management

1402 it, but it makes them feel good and that's why they're prepared to turn up and prepared to
1403 give their time and prepared to pay their subs. And they're prepared to put in a little bit of
1404 homework in between times. In the same way that you don't pander to all the good people in
1405 the choir and leave the strugglers to struggle and that you don't only concentrate on the
1406 people who need all the help. And someone who can inspire a choir to a really good
1407 performance, even if they don't feel they've rehearsed it quite as much as they would have
1408 liked to or they don't feel confident that they're singing the right words in a foreign language.
1409 But someone who can just give that lift because it is a performance. It's not like collecting
1410 rare books, which is very lovely, but it's not something you need to do for somebody else.
1411 This is a thing that you do because it makes you feel good and you can share it with other
1412 people. And you need someone who's going to enable you to do that and to make you feel
1413 able to have a go at something you might feel totally unqualified for.

Commented [EL180]: *Leadership characteristics:* Inspiring

1414
1415 I know from presenting different pieces to the [choral society], people say "Oh, gosh, you
1416 know, this is really hard" and some people will say that they never want to do that piece again:
1417 "I loved it, but I didn't like the way it made me have to concentrate so much." And I think well,
1418 okay, I get that, they loved the performance, they loved the singing of it, but they didn't like
1419 having to work so hard at their hobby and that's fair enough. Thinking back, about three years
1420 ago we did Howells's *Hymnus Paradisi* and it was hard work. It's a jolly hard piece. It's
1421 probably the hardest thing we've had to do with the singers and I wouldn't ever want to do it on
1422 a three-hour rehearsal ever again. We had the cathedral choirs in as well and that sort of
1423 helped and sort of made people think oh, you know, this is all sort of a bit much. But you
1424 know, I think most people would say that they were pleased to have done it. There were two
1425 people who thought it had taken years off their life and just never wanted to sing it again, you
1426 know.

Commented [EL181]: *Leadership characteristics:* Inspiring

Commented [EL182]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Programming skills

Commented [EL183]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Challenging/demanding

1427
1428 I'm just reminded of a conductor that I worked with about 17 years ago now and he conducted
1429 a choral society in the south. And he used to turn up to this choir rehearsal week after week
1430 and he was unspeakably rude to them. Really, really rude. In the pub afterwards, they just
1431 used to queue up to buy him drinks and I never understood why because he was horrible to
1432 them and they weren't brilliant singers, but I can remember some concerts and I don't
1433 remember them being appalling. But I never quite understood the relationship that kept them
1434 so enthralled.

Commented [EL184]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Engendering loyalty from singers

1436 **RESEARCHER**

1437 Yes, it's like Stockholm Syndrome. What sort of culture do you try to build within the [choral
1438 society] or is that heavily influenced by a committee?

1439

1440 **C4**

1441 Yeah, I mean, the committee's strong and it's quite good, but I would say that the committee
1442 really exists in a supportive capacity and I've been to so many choral society rehearsals,
1443 where the committee is in charge and the conductor gets to do his thing for three-quarters of
1444 an hour here and three-quarters of an hour there and that's that. Ours is collaborative, but
1445 no-one's leaning on anybody. At the moment we're exclusively an adult choir. We have in the
1446 past had younger singers, young children of singers who've come along to sing and that's
1447 been great. At the moment, we've got a really interesting set-up. One of our singers is from
1448 Venezuela and we have another singer, who's joined very recently because his grandfather
1449 is in the choir and he's a linguist. Our Venezuelan has some good English, but she struggles
1450 to understand quite a lot of the fill-in stuff, which must be very difficult, but this other guy is
1451 able to talk to her at the beginning - they chat away in Spanish, which is really lovely to hear
1452 before the rehearsal goes off.

1453

1454 And we have a very friendly kind of atmosphere, we know we're all there to make music. I
1455 would try always with a choir to be light-hearted, to create an atmosphere where the music-
1456 making is fun, but not to the point of making it inappropriate. I would always want to make
1457 people feel that I was taking them seriously and that we've got a job to do, but there are ways
1458 of doing it. And there are times when we don't have the time to be really relaxed and stress-
1459 free. And actually we're going to be pressured. And part of what we do in rehearsal has to be
1460 geared towards how it's going to be in a performance because there is no point in propping
1461 a choir up all the way through a rehearsal period and making life really easy for them to
1462 discover on the day of the concert they're standing somewhere they didn't know, the
1463 accompaniment is totally different and go to pieces because actually the conductor didn't
1464 prepare them for the performance. So it's a friendly environment, but with that they have paid
1465 their subs, so that they can come and sing. They're not there for me to tell them lots of stories
1466 about my life and career, but they do appreciate occasionally hearing something which will
1467 illuminate what we're doing or hearing something about the person who wrote the music and
1468 we would try every year to incorporate living composers into our music programmes. And we

Commented [EL185]: Leadership characteristics:
Managing culture

Commented [EL186]: Leadership characteristics:
Challenging/demanding

Commented [EL187]: Leadership characteristics: Goal-
orientated

Commented [EL188]: Leadership characteristics:
Providing musical context

1469 managed for about five or six years to do a series of programmes on living composers and
1470 actually got the composer involved somehow as well.

Commented [EL189]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Providing extraordinary experiences

1471
1472 **RESEARCHER**

1473 Thinking about giving feedback to a choir, what do you think the balance should be between
1474 praise and criticism in an average rehearsal?

1475
1476 **C4**

1477 That was a question I found very difficult to work out, so to say. I think one thing is that I will
1478 always be honest. And I really have to push that two ways, particularly with the [choral society]
1479 and if they say “Oh, that was terrible”, I will say “Actually no it wasn’t terrible”, explain/hone
1480 in on something which they perceived as the defining characteristic of that performance. But
1481 my goal is to get the singers through the music in a way that they feel the next time they do
1482 it, it is going to be better and more enjoyable. So I will praise them for what is good and I will
1483 help them see how we can make things better if that needs to happen. I won’t tell them that
1484 something is good if it wasn’t because (a) I don’t think that’s right and (b) I don’t think it does
1485 your credibility any good if they know something was bad, and you say, “Oh, that was brilliant,
1486 well done.” You know, you can be really honest with someone and say, “Look, we tried really
1487 hard and that was fantastic. Okay, the end was a complete mess because nobody watched
1488 and you all sang at different speeds and so we didn’t finish together. But the rest of it was
1489 really good and you worked really hard.”

Commented [EL190]: *Feedback:* Honesty

Commented [EL191]: *Feedback:* Creating a positive experience

Commented [EL192]: *Feedback:* Positive feedback (specific)

Commented [EL193]: *Feedback:* Actionable advice

Commented [EL194]: *Feedback:* Issues with overpraising

Commented [EL195]: *Feedback:* Appreciation

Commented [EL196]: *Feedback:* Honesty

1490
1491 And I think it’s a little bit clinical, but the other thing is that I am really not very good personally
1492 at disguising what I think of something in the moment. I mean terrible and some people find
1493 this very distracting. I did work with a choir on my last job where they found that the other
1494 conductors never betrayed an emotion on their face and they said “We don’t know whether
1495 you think that was good or whether you think it was bad. And at the end, you say thanks very
1496 much and we don’t know how did we do?” And they said to me “Okay, sometimes it’s a bit
1497 difficult, but at least we know what you think.”

Commented [EL197]: *Feedback:* Non-verbal (general)

1498
1499 **RESEARCHER**

1500 And is that the case mid-performance as well?

1501
1502

1503 **C4**

1504 Oh, I'm afraid it is, yeah. I do very genuinely believe that if someone is aware that something
1505 isn't right, they stand a better chance of putting it right than if they think it's all going
1506 swimmingly and they're a bar out. There are ways of doing that. I mean, it's one of the issues
1507 with being you know-, I try to be a very clear conductor because at the end of the day, I want
1508 everybody to do well and if they're able to put extra artistry in then that's great. But if I didn't
1509 give them a clear lead to show them where to sing, then I'm not, I'm not helping them to do
1510 anything.

Commented [EL198]: *Leadership characteristics*: Clear direction

1511

1512 And so I always say to a choir, I'm not going to be the most exciting flashy conductor you'll
1513 meet. I think I can inspire people in some way, but I will always try and be a clear one. And I
1514 think it comes down to the fact you know, can we do something about this? If the choir is
1515 consistently coming in on the wrong note? Why didn't I teach them the right note to come in
1516 on? Is it something in the orchestral accompaniment that's giving them a bum steer? It's my
1517 job to say "Look, we're gonna practice working around this." If it's a sudden sort of, you know,
1518 freak accident in the middle of a concert, you can be surprised by that. If it's something
1519 frustrating, you've really worked it and knocked the problem away and then in the middle of
1520 the performance, it comes back. That's when I'm at my most obviously disappointed, and
1521 frustrated and people know that.

Commented [EL199]: *Leadership characteristics*: Inspiring

1522

1523 I do look at people a lot and quite often I will catch the eye of all the people around the person
1524 I'm trying to look at, but not the person themselves. And in the performance of Monteverdi
1525 *Vespers* back in 2014, one lady in the sopranos had her eyes closed for the entirety of the
1526 last page. She was just taken up to heaven and she was having a lovely time and she had
1527 her eyes closed all the way through. And I didn't know what I thought I could achieve by
1528 mouthing at her "Please watch me", but I felt I was doing some good here. And as the choir
1529 came off, and I was saying "Terrific, really well done" the sopranos were saying "I'm so sorry,
1530 I wasn't watching." "If you could see me saying that, then you clearly were watching me and
1531 actually I was trying to get X's attention and she wasn't watching at all."

Commented [EL201]: *Feedback*: Targeting feedback

1532

1533 **RESEARCHER**

1534 How do you target feedback at the right people?

1535

1536

1537 **C4**

1538 That's the thing that I find absolutely the hardest thing and what I find maybe has helped
1539 engender this atmosphere, but I find that people are much easier coming to me and saying I
1540 have a problem with X. And I say this week after week, month after month to the choir, you've
1541 got my email address and some of them have got my phone number. I'm always happy to
1542 talk about anything if they have any problems, any question, no question too stupid. And
1543 people do come to me after rehearsals and say I was just struggling with such and such a
1544 thing. What I find really hard is if there's one person who is making a persistent error or has
1545 a persistent issue, and that there's no easy way to help them understand that because of
1546 their own character. And I've known it particularly with people who can't come off in time, or
1547 people maybe have a slightly shrill voice. It's very difficult because singing is so much more
1548 of a personal thing than just about any other activity you can do. You know, short of something
1549 that you've made, and you can say that's a very nice pot, but I don't think you could really put
1550 flowers in it because they'd fall out of the bottom. With singing, people will actually take great
1551 offence if you say "Look, can you just sing a little more quietly there." And I'm afraid I have to
1552 admit to drawing a complete blank, so much so that this is what I think in a choral society that
1553 voice reps are good at. You have a word with the voice rep and then you find a way of getting
1554 alongside the person, so that it's not a top-down bollocking if another singer can address that
1555 issue.

Commented [EL202]: *Leadership characteristics:* Singer development

1556
1557 I know one conductor locally who's very good at walking up to a voice part and saying Sir or
1558 Madam, please stop or you're singing flat. And he affects not to be able to remember his
1559 singers' names. And I know he knows that because he's been with that choir for at least 25
1560 years and he knows who everybody is, but it's a really good way of making it a non-personal
1561 issue. I don't know how I would do it better. And I must say some people, I know there are
1562 some people particularly in the [choral society] that I can go to and say look that lead there
1563 needs a little bit of this, it's a little bit flat can we work on that or actually you could just be a
1564 little softer there. And usually, people will take that in good heart. But I think there are
1565 individuals I struggle with because you don't want to offend them.

Commented [EL203]: *Feedback:* Use of section leaders

Commented [EL204]: *Feedback:* Targeting feedback

Commented [EL205]: *Feedback:* Targeting feedback

1567 **RESEARCHER**

1568 Just one final question: how do you approach that final piece of advice that you give to a choir
1569 before go out to perform?

1570

1571 **C4**

1572 I would leave people ideally with the instruction you know to, to have fun, but to make the
1573 music. And if that needs a little point, like make sure you watch or you breathe in enough time
1574 or make sure your words are clear. It depends, there might be one thing just to give people
1575 something to think about, but I think just leaving them to it, you know, I'd be slightly twitchy.
1576 The people who know what they're doing aren't going to listen anyway, but the people who
1577 need their hand holding need you to say something.

1578

1579 **RESEARCHER**

1580 Thank you so much for your time. This has been fascinating.

1581

1582 - *End of interview* -

Commented [EL206]: *Feedback:* Pre-performance feedback

1583 **C5 Interview – 7 December 2021 8pm**

1584

1585 **RESEARCHER**

1586 Please could you describe the choirs that you currently conduct?

1587

1588 **C5**

1589 They would be adult community choirs and adult church choirs.

1590

1591 **RESEARCHER**

1592 And how many people are in the choirs?

1593

1594 **C5**

1595 Probably 15 in one and about the same, between 12 and 15.

1596

1597 **RESEARCHER**

1598 Please confirm details of any formal music education, whether that's lessons, exams,
1599 courses, etc.

1600

1601 **C5**

1602 So yes, so did my BMus, I have singing teaching qualifications and have over the last 20
1603 years directed choirs.

1604

1605 **RESEARCHER**

1606 So how much would you say that education versus experience has contributed to your
1607 proficiency as a conductor?

1608

1609 **C5**

1610 I would say more experience. Definitely. A high 80 to 85% would be experience, I think.

1611

1612 **RESEARCHER**

1613 And would you say that it's just the experience of running choirs or the experience of other
1614 things in your life that have contributed to your conductor ability in its broadest sense?

1615

1616 **C5**

1617 The music aside, I think other things that I have done in my career would all have lent
1618 themselves to probably how I manage things, so whether it be dealing with people on a day-
1619 to-day basis or delivering information to people or organising information, I should think there
1620 are a lot of transferable skills that probably have been honed in a non-musical environment
1621 in order to be able to manage some of the responsibilities around being a choir director.

1622
1623 **RESEARCHER**

1624 How would you describe your leadership style in the choirs that you currently run? And does
1625 it vary between groups?

1626
1627 **C5**

1628 I think my leadership style is—, I think I'm quite collaborative. And so, I'm not, I don't just set it
1629 out and say okay, we're going to do this, this, this, this and this, and it's my way or no way at
1630 all. I think I have as much to learn from some of the singers, as they do from me. So I can be
1631 quite open to their constructive, maybe it's not criticism, but you know, if they if have a point
1632 to get across or they have a query on something, and you know, it gives me pause for thought,
1633 yeah, that's another way of doing things. So I think I'm probably more collaborative, but I bring
1634 the experience of singing, being a vocalist, so maybe then I can share technique. And I
1635 probably have a better experience of repertoire, but can still be very open to giving them
1636 choices. And I think that's important ,so that you know that they are enjoying what they're
1637 doing, and that they are getting something from it. Listening to what they want and hopefully
1638 working together to deliver something at the end of the day, that will be, you know, whether
1639 it's a performance or sometimes it's not necessarily a big concert, maybe it's just the weekly
1640 hymns or anthem or whatever it is, but giving them the opportunity to do the best they can
1641 do.

1642
1643 **RESEARCHER**

1644 What do you think they want?

1645
1646 **C5**

1647 I think they want some guidance and structure. But at the same time, they want to be enjoying
1648 what they're doing. And that they get a good product at the end of it. I try and make it as
1649 enjoyable, whilst at the same time trying to teach them, so that they go away feeling like
1650 they've had a really good experience and yet they have learned something as well. And

Commented [EL207]: Leadership characteristics:
Teamwork

Commented [EL208]: Leadership characteristics: Vocal
pedagogy skills

Commented [EL209]: Leadership characteristics:
Programming skills

Commented [EL210]: Leadership characteristics:
Understanding singers

Commented [EL211]: Leadership characteristics: Goal-
orientated

Commented [EL212]: Leadership characteristics:
Understanding singers

Commented [EL213]: Leadership characteristics: Positive
experience

1651 maybe it's stretched them without them realising that it has stretched them, you know, that
1652 I've managed to get them from A to B. I suppose that's more evident when I do short-term
1653 projects, so if I do [a project] where maybe you've only got four or five rehearsals maximum,
1654 to put on a big concert, and initially, it's quite daunting, and they might look at the choice of
1655 music (and there'll be a mixed ability) and they might be thinking "Oh, my goodness." Well,
1656 in fact, probably by week two or three, they'll be thinking "Oh, my goodness, we've only got
1657 two rehearsals left, how are we going to do that?" But I think because they trust my
1658 judgement. And they know that I wouldn't give them something that I didn't think that they
1659 were capable of doing, or that I wasn't capable of delivering on in helping them make that
1660 journey from the beginning to the end (and that we go through a little bit of a scary patch in
1661 the middle). And that's how it's going to be. I think, because I'm very upfront about that as
1662 well. And reassuring. And just try to get the best out of them. And I think to get the best out
1663 of people, I want them to be able to enjoy it. And that comes across and, touch wood, it has
1664 worked.

1665
1666 **RESEARCHER**

1667 So do you provide rehearsal tracks for them to learn at home?

1668
1669 **C5**

1670 Yes, I do provide rehearsal tracks. So actually what I do now is I will create a rehearsal site.
1671 And I will put everything on there, whether it be tracks that I have created myself, sometimes,
1672 you know, with the wonder of the internet, there'll be some lovely people out there who have
1673 already created soprano, alto, tenor and bass tracks. And why reinvent the wheel, if it's how
1674 it comes across and it is how you would like to perform it. In the last year or so it's been very
1675 different. We did a lot of virtual performances. So that was interesting because then I found,
1676 actually, that a lot of the singers, because they were singing quite regularly and because they
1677 were recording every week, and sometimes more for the church choir. They were recording
1678 at least three hymns, maybe an anthem every now and then. And three hymns still takes a
1679 fair bit of, you think it's quite easy, just sing it through. But as I have found doing alto, tenor
1680 and bass, it's not quite so straightforward. But they've found as well that their ability to learn.
1681 And those who maybe weren't as experienced, when we did all get back together again,
1682 found it much easier to either sightread or just to be able to pick up music very quickly.

1683
1684 **RESEARCHER**

Commented [EL214]: *Leadership characteristics:* Building trust

Commented [EL215]: *Leadership characteristics:* Authentic

Commented [EL216]: *Leadership characteristics:* Reassuring

Commented [EL217]: *Leadership characteristics:* Positive experience

Commented [EL218]: *Leadership characteristics:* Providing learning resources

Commented [EL219]: *Leadership characteristics:* Singer development

1685 How did they record them?

1686

1687 **C5**

1688 They have a backing track that I created with me singing their part and playing their part. And
1689 it was very basic, really. So they obviously listen with their headphones in and they'd record
1690 themselves on voice memo and send it over to me (with instructions of having the phone
1691 about five feet away and the volume turned down). And I also gave them very strict
1692 instructions not to listen to themselves before sending it, otherwise they wouldn't have sent
1693 anything. That's the thing as well is having the confidence to do that. And I think because I
1694 said don't listen to yourself, just send it, if you know that you've gone wrong drastically then
1695 just say verse one and two are fine, I'm going to record verse three separately and send that
1696 on its own. Or if the ending went slightly wrong, just re-record the ending at the end. And I
1697 think again, that also there is the trust there, that I was going to take their individual voices
1698 and make them sound like they would have sounded as a choir. And all I really did was what
1699 I would have done as a conductor. So normally you'd bring them in, you would make sure
1700 they came off at the right places and really that's kind of what I did digitally. So I didn't really
1701 mess around with their sound. I synchronised them and maybe here and there the balance,
1702 that would be as much as I would have done, really, but then that is what you would have
1703 done if I was stood in front of them if somebody was singing too loudly, or a little bit quieter.
1704 So I didn't, you know, change the tuning or anything like that. Well, because what would be
1705 the point? Because when they came back together, you don't want the sound to be drastically
1706 different.

1707

1708 **RESEARCHER**

1709 And in thinking about your role of leading a choir, whether in rehearsal or in performance, or
1710 in those moments in between, please, can you describe all the different skills that you need
1711 to have to be able to do that effectively?

1712

1713 **C5**

1714 That's quite a lot really, when you try and break it down, isn't it? So I think you have to be
1715 organised and prepared. Before you even start just having an idea of what you want to
1716 achieve from the rehearsal/performance and understanding where that particular group are
1717 already going to be before you start and so you have that awareness of what you might need

Commented [EL220]: *Leadership characteristics: Building trust*

Commented [EL221]: *Leadership characteristics: Aural skills*

1718 to do and what you'll need to put in place. Listening, being observant as well to the body
1719 signals that you can get. So, yeah, preparation, observation, listening.

Commented [EL222]: *Leadership characteristics:* Planning

1720

Commented [EL223]: *Leadership characteristics:* Observant

1721 Also, while I like to be collaborative and I like to ensure that everyone is having a good time,

Commented [EL224]: *Leadership characteristics:* Aural skills

1722 you still have a job to do, and you've got to get them to a certain place. So you do still have

Commented [EL225]: *Leadership characteristics:* Focused

1723 to be strict, I think that can be harder with adults, than it is with children. And also, depending

1724 on the age range, as well. So it's managing people, you definitely have to be able to manage

1725 a group, and you've got sometimes a lot of very different personalities. And so it's

Commented [EL226]: *Leadership characteristics:* People management

1726 understanding your singers as well, I think that can be harder with a very large group.

Commented [EL227]: *Leadership characteristics:* Understanding singers

1727 Sometimes I've had up to 100 singers, and again, to achieve what you need to do in a short

1728 space of time, you do have to be to be able to be firm to move onto the next thing and at the

1729 same time be noting down what you do need to revisit or practise later.

Commented [EL228]: *Feedback:* Understanding when to correct

1730

1731 I think you have to do multiple things. I mean, some of the things you just have to do all at

1732 the same time. So it's like you know, they're singing in front of you and you're trying to listen

1733 to all parts, pick out what's not quite right, whilst listening to everything and keeping them

1734 together. So it's a bit of a juggling act, isn't it? You've got a lot of balls in the air or plates

1735 spinning. And you've got to have attention to detail as well to pick up sometimes very little

Commented [EL229]: *Leadership characteristics:* Multitasking

1736 things or just being able to hone in on a certain part or voice.

Commented [EL230]: *Leadership characteristics:* Precision

1737

1738 And that's another thing as well as dealing with, you know, it's how you deal with those

1739 situations that are quite awkward. So if somebody's voice is perhaps not in tune or even a

1740 whole section just hasn't got something right, it's how you then address those things that

1741 aren't quite right without making people feel embarrassed or upset, but at the same time

1742 trying to get your point across and to get a better result.

Commented [EL231]: *Feedback:* Negative feedback

1743

1744 **RESEARCHER**

1745 How do you do that? How do you target the right singers?

1746

1747 **C5**

1748 It's a hard thing to do, I think it all depends as well on the person. So again, I think you have

1749 to know your singers. So I know that there would be certain singers that I could, or people

1750 that I could, be quite frank with them and say "X, I can hear you're nearly there, but you're

1751 just slightly under the pitch. So try doing this instead." Or maybe, if that particular person may

Commented [EL232]: *Feedback:* Understanding singers

1752 either be more embarrassed or take offence, you want to be a little bit more considerate of
1753 how you approach it, perhaps you do it as a section or have them listening out to each other
1754 a little bit more. And always offers something that's, don't just come in with this is what the
1755 problem is, you need to be able to help them address it and overcome it. And so you have to
1756 give them some skills or techniques to help them to overcome that. It's no good saying "Oh,
1757 you're singing flat. You sing flat every week, why can't you get it?" You know, that's not really
1758 going to do much for their self-esteem, and thus, they will not sing very well, I don't think, later
1759 on. So I think I probably have more of a demonstrative style. I think being a singer helps me
1760 encourage them to be better singers.

Commented [EL233]: *Feedback:* Diplomatic

Commented [EL234]: *Feedback:* Actionable advice

1761
1762 **RESEARCHER**

1763 How important do you think it is for a conductor to understand vocal technique?

1764

1765

1766 **C5**

1767 I think it is very important. I mean, I wouldn't be able to stand in front of an orchestra. I mean,
1768 I could, but I wouldn't be able to do as good a job as an instrumental or as an orchestral
1769 conductor. I don't think unless I'd honed those skills and I had a lot of experience with it. But
1770 I don't think I would. And again, it's knowing the instruments, knowing all the parts. And I think
1771 that's the same for orchestral/instrumental conductors, who then try and conduct a choir or
1772 vocal ensemble. And if they don't have that, that technique, and they don't have that
1773 experience, I think it's harder.

1774

1775 I think that's probably because with singing, it's not like you can see the notes that you're
1776 pressing, and I think a lot of it is more, it's really being a lot more observant of your body. And
1777 understanding how things feel. You know, sometimes it's doing the psychological things, or
1778 imagining different things to try and get that sound that you want to create. And also it's
1779 because the body is your instrument, and you also don't want them to damage it. And so if
1780 you've got amateur singers, who've maybe not had lessons they only really have the
1781 technique that's been shared with them through other conductors or maybe they haven't. I
1782 think there's just so many different things. And I think with singing anyway, and even just for
1783 solo, professional singers, you're finding out all the time. I don't think you ever, I mean, it's
1784 probably the same as well for instrumental players, but I don't think you stop learning about
1785 your body, you don't stop learning from the physiological side how to do things or how to keep

1786 improving on the tone or working on how to do larger intervals or back again or making it a
1787 smooth line. All those things, which I think if you have somebody who knows and understands
1788 how to do that, then they can share that with you, and I think you can get a quicker result.
1789 Yes I think if you've got a short amount of time, then I think if you have somebody who is a
1790 singer, you will get there, you'll get from A to B quicker.

Commented [EL235]: *Leadership characteristics:* Vocal pedagogy skills

1791
1792 **RESEARCHER**

1793 And what about the art of gesturing, for example, beating time etc? How important is that for
1794 a choral conductor?

1795
1796 **C5**

1797 I don't think that the pattern is as important. I think it's more the expression. And actually,
1798 having done choral conducting courses, it all depends on the group that you have. So if you've
1799 got a choir that is less proficient and experienced, they're not always going to remember to
1800 look at you. So you have to engage them and draw them in and I think then your actions and
1801 your gestures may be bigger. Perhaps so, if you have a larger number of people that you
1802 need to do that to. When there's less, you know, not so much and I think I have to adapt what
1803 I do. So obviously, bringing them in is very important how you do that and coming off, and all
1804 the bits in between. If I have singers who don't read music, then I will help them by indicating
1805 (*moving hand up and down*) if there is going to be a large leap, so they have an idea where
1806 the music is going. The rest is the dynamics and it's the emphasis that you want, you know,
1807 the emotion that you want to hear.

Commented [EL236]: *Leadership characteristics:* Conducting/gesturing skills

1808
1809 **RESEARCHER**

1810 Does that change with repertoire?

1811
1812 **C5**

1813 I think sometimes you get to know when less is more. Yeah. And not to be too effusive with
1814 your movements. Yeah, I think it depends on the—, like, if you were doing Chilcott's *Every*
1815 *Time I Feel the Spirit*, then you really want them to be moving around and having that energy.
1816 You have to demonstrate that energy to get it from them, whereas if you're doing an *Ave*
1817 *Verum* or something it is different. We did the *Nimrod*, oh goodness, for voices. And that's
1818 not a particularly long piece, but my goodness, that three in a bar, I had to practise that a lot
1819 at home, just because it is so slow, but you do have to keep it going. And, and again, it's quite

Commented [EL237]: *Leadership characteristics:* Conducting/gesturing skills

1820 physical and I don't think people realise how you do have to practise at home, so you can
1821 last the piece.

1822
1823 And I mean, you've got to know your pieces better than your singers know them because you
1824 have to know all of their parts to be able to bring them in. And so that they know that they can
1825 rely on you that you're going to look at them. You can keep the beat going and then you can
1826 do this (*pulling hand towards body*) and then you're trying to draw them out or lengthen it
1827 (*pulling hands apart across body*).

1828
1829 **RESEARCHER**
1830 Are there any particularly notable traits that you think a good conductor has?

1831
1832 **C5**
1833 Patience, lots of patience, adaptability, think you've got to be quite flexible and adaptable. To
1834 know your choir and know your singers and be prepared to adapt the piece that you're
1835 performing, so that they can sing it to the best of their ability. Being conscientious, being
1836 prepared, a good listener and being observant and I'm sure there's many, many more. A good
1837 sense of humour.

1838
1839 **RESEARCHER**
1840 Are there any bad traits that you've seen in other conductors that you try to avoid having
1841 yourself?

1842
1843 **C5**
1844 If you [the singers] go wrong and they [the conductor] go (brushing off shoulder) or if you [the
1845 singers] go wrong and they [the conductor] pull a horrendous face or give you "the look".
1846
1847 You [the conductor] know that moment has happened and gone. And, you know, you're not
1848 getting anything from showing that it's annoyed you. It might annoy you, you might think how
1849 many times have we practised that and you've got it wrong. But if you let that show, then all
1850 you're going to do is make your choir nervous for the rest of the piece that you still have to
1851 get through.

1852

Commented [EL238]: Leadership characteristics: Score understanding

Commented [EL239]: Leadership characteristics: Patience

Commented [EL240]: Leadership characteristics: Adaptable

Commented [EL241]: Leadership characteristics: Arranging songs

Commented [EL242]: Leadership characteristics: Conscientious

Commented [EL243]: Leadership characteristics: Organisational/planning skills

Commented [EL244]: Leadership characteristics: Aural skills

Commented [EL245]: Leadership characteristics: Observant

Commented [EL246]: Leadership characteristics: Sense of humour

Commented [EL247]: Feedback: Non-verbal (negative)

1853 I tell them all, if we go wrong, we smile and we keep going. If I'm smiling more than usual
1854 though, perhaps that's a key that I know what's happened, but we're carrying on anyway and
1855 we will get to the end and it will be fine. We're all in it together. So really it's that feeling that
1856 it doesn't matter, I'll catch you if you fall and you will be fine and we'll get to the get to the
1857 end, which is why I like to learn a piece from the back to the front rather than the front to the
1858 back or at least try to spend as much time at the end as the beginning because otherwise
1859 you're gonna end up keep doing the beginning over and over.

Commented [EL248]: Leadership characteristics:
Teamwork

Commented [EL249]: Leadership characteristics:
Reassuring

1861 I think actually, another good trait of a conductor is the music you choose as well. It's choosing
1862 your repertoire. Well, that's a bit different, I think for choral just because there's an expectation
1863 of the different pieces and it's what people want to learn and they want to be stretched a bit.
1864 So again, I think you just have to, you have to read the room. And it depends as well whether
1865 you are being engaged to be the conductor for that choir or if it is your choir. You have
1866 different obligations. So it could be that it is like this is what we want you to do. You don't
1867 have the artistic license to choose what you're going to do, so that puts a different pressure
1868 on you.

Commented [EL250]: Leadership characteristics:
Programming skills

1870 When you're a guest conductor it can be quite daunting as well. It depends if you know the
1871 style and the technique of the other conductor to what you're going into. And actually, you
1872 don't have as much time to impress yourself upon them. You don't want to stand there and
1873 feel like you're a fraud, like imposter syndrome. It's like, no, I really do know what I'm doing.

Commented [EL251]: Leadership characteristics:
Understanding the organisation

Commented [EL252]: Leadership characteristics: Different
roles

1875 RESEARCHER

1876 So thinking about giving feedback to a choir, what do you think the balance should be
1877 between praise and criticism in an average rehearsal?

1879 C5

1880 I think it is probably equal parts, perhaps. I think if you're going to give constructive criticism,
1881 as long as you can back it up: I think if you can help, you know, you can offer whether it's
1882 technical advice, whatever it is to get them to where they need to be. Again, it also depends
1883 as well, there is that criticism if they really haven't practised and you've got to say "Come on,
1884 look, we need to pull our socks up. At the moment, you know, this performance is worth £6.50
1885 and we're selling tickets for £10. Come on, we need to all work together here." Yeah, I think
1886 you have to be honest. There are times when you do need to do it for morale, perhaps you

Commented [EL253]: Feedback: Actionable advice

Commented [EL254]: Feedback: Honesty

1887 need to lift them, but you can't do that all the time. And say, you know, because it becomes
1888 meaningless and you're not doing them any favours and they won't improve. And sometimes
1889 you do have to be firm, but I think it's how, again, it's how you deliver it. And how it comes
1890 across without belittling anyone or making them feel embarrassed. You don't want to put
1891 them off, so they don't come back again. I don't know, I've always found that uncomfortable,
1892 you know, when people were very condescending. At the same time, you don't want to be
1893 too effusive with it. So I think it's very, it's a balanced approach that you do give criticism, but
1894 also you have to reward as well. It's kind of a bit of good cop/bad cop, isn't it?

Commented [EL255]: Feedback: Issues with overpraising

Commented [EL256]: Feedback: Firm

Commented [EL257]: Feedback: Diplomatic

Commented [EL258]: Feedback: Balanced approach

1896 RESEARCHER

1897 How much non-verbal feedback do you think you use?

1898

1899 C5

1900 I think I give a lot. I think I'm better at the very positive expressions and energy, very happy,
1901 sharing it and I want to draw that out from everybody and yes, look at me and we're all getting
1902 through this, rather than if they've gone wrong and I'm frowning, just pulling the most
1903 horrendous face ever seen. I think I like to be encouraging.

Commented [EL259]: Feedback: Non-verbal (positive)

Commented [EL260]: Feedback: Encouraging

1905 RESEARCHER

1906 Thank you very much. That's been really helpful, I appreciate it.

1907

1908 - End of interview -

1909 **C6 Interview – 17 December 2021 2pm**

1910

1911 **RESEARCHER**

1912 So I'd like to start by asking you to describe the choirs that you currently conduct.

1913

1914 **C6**

1915 Okay, so I have five choirs, and they are non-auditioned adult pop choirs. I often call them
1916 community choirs because I think they are communities in their own right as it were.

1917

1918 **RESEARCHER**

1919 And how many people are in the choirs?

1920

1921 **C6**

1922 We had about 100 members in each choir, some a little bit more, some a little bit less. But
1923 now, our maximum is 60 in one choir, all socially distanced. And that's the maximum we can
1924 fit into that space. And the smallest now is, I think, 40. Singing in a smaller group, you know,
1925 especially the less confident singers, who could be anonymous before. They could turn up
1926 and kind of ride on the coattails of the people who were around them that knew what they
1927 were doing and enjoy the full experience like that. They're having to be a bit more
1928 independent, which I think has been scary for them.

1929

1930 **RESEARCHER**

1931 Please could you confirm details of any formal music education that you've had whether that's
1932 lessons exams, courses etc.

1933

1934 **C6**

1935 My highest level is I've got a music degree, BA (Hons) in Music - I actually majored in
1936 composition, at Dartington College of Arts.

1937

1938 **RESEARCHER**

1939 How has this led you to where you are now?

1940

1941 **C6**

1942 I did a project in the final year at college, we had a public project it was called, where we were
1943 to go out and kind of use our skills in the community. In my hometown in Lincolnshire, I stayed
1944 there for an extra three months and did a project with a church choir. So a local church, and
1945 there were only five or 10 of them or something like that. And they were such a lovely group
1946 of people, had a really lovely time with them. And they so loved it, they loved singing, they
1947 were hungry to learn more. It was a big learning lesson for me as well, of course, in how to,
1948 you know, my first kind of steps into teaching as well, and yet really loved the experience of
1949 it.

1950
1951 And so, when did it really kind of come back to singing because I taught piano for ages? I
1952 didn't major in voice at all and I taught piano for years. And it just it was an accidental thing
1953 really, I guess. I was working in a school where their singing teacher, their performing arts
1954 teacher suddenly left and the head of music came to me and said "Would you take it?"
1955 because she ran a choir and I sang in that. I was like "God, I haven't had any training." And
1956 she went, "I don't care", she said "I think it'd be really good. I think you've got a lovely voice.
1957 And I think you'd be really good at it." And I did, I absolutely loved it. I absolutely loved it.

1958
1959 And it just kind of then more work offers came in. I worked for Stagecoach Theatre Arts for a
1960 while. And I've worked for Exeter College here – I've taught on their A-level performing arts
1961 courses. All absolutely superb work, but started [adult pop choir] as well. Actually, a friend of
1962 mine asked me to go with her to sing in a gospel choir local to here. And we loved it. Had a
1963 really nice time the first couple of weeks - it was run by some students at the time. And then
1964 they announced that they were leaving the area and the whole thing was going to close. And
1965 so we stepped up and said, hey, we'll take it on. And so we did and, and it grew from 25
1966 members to 100 I think it was in about 18 months and just thought okay, obviously we are
1967 really doing something right or, you know, it's just the zeitgeist at the moment, or maybe a
1968 mixture of the two. So why not start to actually do this seriously?

1969
1970 **RESEARCHER**

1971 And what year was that?

1972

1973 **C6**

1974 That would have been, oh my goodness, that would have been 2008 I think that would have
1975 been.

1976 **RESEARCHER**

1977 So how many years would you say you have of choral conducting experience?

1978

1979 **C6**

1980 Starting from 2008, so that would be 13 years. No, I think you can only really start from then
1981 because the stuff I did before, it would be classed as experience but say 13 years.

1982

1983 **RESEARCHER**

1984 So you would say that your experiences has had more impact than your education on being
1985 a conductor?

1986

1987 **C6**

1988 Difficult to quantify that I guess. I think my education had a big impact in many ways, you
1989 know, my first forays into, but yeah, I feel like most of the learning has happened since. We
1990 are looking at two very different timescales, when it was only three years at college really and
1991 I've had however many since then.

1992

1993 **RESEARCHER**

1994 How would you describe your leadership style in the choirs that you currently run? And does
1995 it vary between groups?

1996

1997 **C6**

1998 I don't think it varies between the groups or at least I hope not. I always think that choirs are
1999 a bit like children. And they're all kind of like children who are all vying for your attention and
2000 wanting to be the favourite, which is, which is lovely, actually, because that means that they
2001 want to do really well. And I love that. So how would I describe my style, I like to think of
2002 myself as very friendly and open, and even slightly madcap humour, and silliness. But also
2003 expecting really high quality and when I'm working with corrections, 95% of the time it's really
2004 encouraging. Occasionally when I'm really stressed, I don't feel that it comes across that way.
2005 It's difficult to know how it comes across, unless I speak to a choir member, I guess.

2006

2007 This last week was a really, really good example, we've just recorded our end of term, our
2008 whole Christmas set, and the numbers of the choir were so much lower and also we've got
2009 no accompanist so I'm playing the backing tracks on a speaker and I don't want it too loud

Commented [EL261]: Leadership characteristics: Friendly

Commented [EL262]: Leadership characteristics: Sense of humour

Commented [EL263]: Feedback: Encouraging

2010 because it'll overtake them. They can't hear very well, so they've going flat and trying to
2011 manage all of that. And internally I'm getting a little bit, because it's not working, getting a bit
2012 stressed. And trying not to let that leak out, but I'm sure some of it must do.

2013
2014
2015 **RESEARCHER**

2016 In thinking about your role in leading the choirs, whether that's in rehearsal or in performance
2017 or in those bits in between, please can you describe all the different skills that you think you
2018 need to make you a proficient conductor.

2019
2020 **C6**

2021 There's the obvious musical skills and communication you know, whether that be in
2022 organising the group and of course whilst conducting and having that understood
2023 communication whilst conducting, so that the choir understand the signs I'm giving them. I
2024 use a bit of sign language as well actually, which I found really helpful. Just really simple stuff.
2025 Like if I want them the altos to add some twang, I'll just give them that (*forming a T-shape*
2026 *with both hands*). So all of that shared understanding of communication there is obviously a
2027 very important skill.

2028
2029 Organisation, I've never been particularly good at being organised. I'm getting a lot better.
2030 There's a certain amount of chaos.

2031
2032 Building relationships, I think is really important, especially, you know, with the choir so that
2033 they trust you. I always feel that, you know, especially with people who are nervous. We quite
2034 often get nervous singers and just encouraging them to come forward and it's okay and so
2035 on. Building trust.

2036
2037 But one of the skills I'm finding difficult, but I am learning is about being able to discern and
2038 be a little bit more because sometimes what can come is a bit of a tsunami of kind of what's
2039 the word? Whether it be emails, or people wanting to come and speak to me about X, Y, Z
2040 or an idea or you know. And a lot of it's stuff I can answer really easily, no problem. But
2041 sometimes there's stuff that I have to make a decision to go no to. I find that very difficult. I'm
2042 not very good at saying no to people. I think it is a really key, key thing.

Commented [EL264]: Leadership characteristics: Music knowledge and skills

Commented [EL265]: Leadership characteristics: Communication

Commented [EL266]: Leadership characteristics: Conducting/gesturing skills

Commented [EL267]: Leadership characteristics: Organisational/planning skills

Commented [EL268]: Leadership characteristics: Building trust

Commented [EL269]: Leadership characteristics: Saying no

2043

2044 What else? Musical skills, pitching skills and being able to sing the line, being able to sing all
2045 the parts and being able to do them to a competent enough standard as well for it to come
2046 across. And then a couple of other, I think, really key skills is some of the science, learning
2047 some of the science behind the voice and how it works, and how you achieve certain
2048 techniques safely. So I do a lot of training with speech language therapists in the area. So
2049 they occasionally meet up, there's a whole group of them that meet up and they do training
2050 and I managed to get involved with that, which is great.

2051

2052 Obviously teaching, I have got a teaching qualification. It's a Cert. Ed., which is for further
2053 education.

2054

2055 What other skills? Being able to get on with people really quickly. And listening. That's huge.
2056 Being able to hear, obviously, when something's not going right in the choir and finding it and
2057 then being able to turn that into, okay, how can I put this across in a way that's palatable and
2058 gets me the results that I want quickly?

2059

2060 **RESEARCHER**

2061 Do you always correct, or do you ever hear things and leave them?

2062

2063 **C6**

2064 Sometimes I leave them. It really depends. Sometimes I might try and fix something, and it's
2065 just not happening. And then after a little while, I'll go "Okay, great. Let's move on." And we'll
2066 come back to that another time, so it varies.

2067

2068 **RESEARCHER**

2069 And you talk about gesturing? What about the beat pattern? How important do you think that
2070 is in your choirs?

2071

2072 **C6**

2073 Conducting the beat? Oh, very important. So yeah, absolutely. And that's what I'll do for most
2074 of a piece just keeping hold of that rhythm. I find it really interesting learning the language,
2075 not the language, but learning what the choir needs from me when I'm conducting a piece:
2076 the bits that they find difficult, you know - that part actually does something very different to

Commented [EL270]: *Leadership characteristics:* Music knowledge and skills

Commented [EL271]: *Leadership characteristics:* Score understanding

Commented [EL272]: *Leadership characteristics:* Vocal pedagogy skills

Commented [EL273]: *Leadership characteristics:* Generic teaching skills

Commented [EL274]: *Leadership characteristics:* Building rapport

Commented [EL275]: *Leadership characteristics:* Aural skills

Commented [EL276]: *Feedback:* Communication

Commented [EL277]: *Feedback:* Understanding when to correct

2077 that part. I'll quite often do pitch with my hands in the shape of the music with them (*moving*
2078 *hands up and down with the pitch*), and then having to learn that part's doing that and give
2079 them that shape (*moving right hand up and down with the pitch*) whilst I'm giving this part
2080 (*moving left hand up and down with the pitch of that part*). That's interesting stuff.

Commented [EL278]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Conducting/gesturing skills

2082 The whole skill set on teaching on Zoom was a totally different thing entirely. My word, that
2083 was interesting. And I think the most difficult skill (especially doing one-to-ones on Zoom
2084 actually), where they're unmuted, but if I'm accompanying them, I'll play the accompaniment
2085 and then they sing along with me. So at their end, they're perfectly in time with me. What I
2086 get is a little delay, so they come back to me about half a beat or so after I've played. That's
2087 been a real learning - trying to keep that steady. You know, because the instinct is to get
2088 together.

Commented [EL279]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Adaptable

2090 **RESEARCHER**

2091 And are there any particularly notable traits that you think a good conductor has?

2093 **C6**

2094 I think friendliness is really important.

Commented [EL280]: *Leadership characteristics:* Friendly

2096 I've seen lots of good conductors, people that I consider to be good conductors, and quite
2097 often have very separate things.

2099 Being able to have everybody on board with you, when they're there in front of you when
2100 you're in a performance, that actually it's a great communication between you and your choir,
2101 and that you're all there. Everyone is absolutely with you and it's a joint effort. All the
2102 conductor is doing is just bringing it together. They're doing all the work, really. So yeah,
2103 having everybody on board and kind of raring to go.

Commented [EL281]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Teamwork

Commented [EL282]: *Leadership characteristics:* Inspiring

2105 **RESEARCHER**

2106 How do conductors go about developing that?

2108 **C6**

2109 I think a conductor probably would develop that in their own way. Could anybody do it?
2110 Because I have this whole thing about anyone can sing. When I did my teacher training, I

2111 asked my fabulous teacher trainer, she was absolutely superb and saw me through hell, it
2112 was a horrible time. There was too much, I was running the [adult pop choir] at the time, I
2113 was also teaching five days a week, it was just too busy and I didn't get a day off for two
2114 years. I asked her did she think everybody could teach. And instantly, she said no. Oh, that's
2115 interesting. Why not? She said because I don't think everybody has the ability to reflect, to
2116 do self-reflection. And that is an essential skill that you need. Actually that needs to be added
2117 into that list of skills: to be able to reflect and look at why did that not go right and what can I
2118 do to fix it?

Commented [EL283]: *Leadership characteristics*: Self-reflection

2119
2120 Which can be painful, because actually, you know, invariably, it's changing your own
2121 behaviour or changing the way you approach the issue. So I don't think I could put that into
2122 a nugget of one skill. I think there are so many skills that conductors need. But certainly
2123 personable. I think is very, very important. Because otherwise you're not going to get people
2124 on board at all.

Commented [EL284]: *Leadership characteristics*: Friendly

2125
2126 **RESEARCHER**

2127 So thinking about giving feedback to a choir, what do you think the balance should be
2128 between praise and criticism in an average rehearsal?

2129
2130 **C6**

2131 In an average rehearsal? I think it should be outweighed, I think it should always be
2132 outweighed as more positive than critical. And I would say, four to five. You know, or three to
2133 five. So out of five bits of feedback four of them would be positive and one more constructive:
2134 "How interesting, oh it went flat. I wonder why that that was because you don't normally go
2135 flat. So what's changed?" We had that this week, "What's going on here? Is it that the backing
2136 track is too quiet because I don't want the microphone to pick it up too much?" So I try and
2137 find reasons that it's gone wrong. So that it becomes a journey of discovery, if that makes
2138 sense, between all of us. Why don't we just change that then? And we've fixed the problem.

Commented [EL285]: *Feedback*: More positive than negative

Commented [EL286]: *Feedback*: Providing an explanation

Commented [EL287]: *Feedback*: Inclusive approach

2139
2140 **RESEARCHER**

2141 Do you talk about vocal technique in a similar sort of way?

2142
2143 **C6**

2144 Yeah, definitely. Yeah, it might be altos I can't hear you. But sopranos you were a bit too loud.
2145 So can you come back down a little bit, but altos I need you to come forward. So we're gonna
2146 just add a bit of twang, because that's going to help you cut through, make it nice and easy,
2147 but we also want to save your voice as well. So this is what we're going to do. We'll practice
2148 it, then put it into context.

Commented [EL288]: *Leadership characteristics*: Vocal pedagogy skills

2149
2150 **RESEARCHER**

2151 Do you think that the praise/criticism balance changes for the last rehearsal before
2152 performance?

2153

2154 **C6**

2155 (*laughs*) Yes. The last rehearsal before a performance is usually a bit more frantic and
2156 usually, I'm a bit stricter. You know, "That's not right, we need to do that again. That's the bit
2157 that we need to look at between now and the concert, please."

Commented [EL289]: *Feedback*: Challenging/demanding

2158

2159 **RESEARCHER**

2160 We've already talked about this a little. How can a conductor frame criticism in a constructive
2161 way and especially if you're limited on time?

2162

2163 **C6**

2164 Yes, yes. Limited time. I think as much as possible, trying to—

2165

2166 Certainly what I never do is single anybody out. If we have corrections, it's for the whole of
2167 that voice part or for the whole choir, you know, but so it's for a group, so that no one feels
2168 that they've been singled out and it might actually be that there's actually only one soprano
2169 I've heard that's really sharp. But I can't address that to that individual. It would be too
2170 confrontational, I think. So I address the whole choir and try to turn them into learning
2171 experiences, where possible. You know, why might that be happening? Is it that we're
2172 pushing a bit too much here, let's just watch that. Let's monitor that, you know, and doing a
2173 lot of that sort of stuff in my warm-ups as well to just try and get them kind of used to—

Commented [EL290]: *Feedback*: No individual feedback in front of choir

2174

2175 Because I don't know if you've ever followed Estill.

2176

2177

Commented [EL291]: *Feedback*: Negative feedback

2178 **RESEARCHER**

2179 I have.

2180

2181 **C6**

2182 Prior to that, of course, everyone used to do the whole power from the diaphragm thing, which
2183 is all going out of the window. It's amazing how that hasn't filtered through yet to most, quite
2184 a lot of singing teachers as well, and choir leaders they haven't got that yet. That's all
2185 changed. So trying to turn it into a learning experience and go well, there's this really
2186 interesting bit of information and let's see if we can now put that in practically somehow and
2187 then put it in the context of a piece. So I'll take the technique that the piece demands, if that
2188 makes sense and then work around that.

Commented [EL292]: *Feedback:* Actionable advice

2189

2190 **RESEARCHER**

2191 How much non-verbal feedback do you think you give? And again, you have partly answered
2192 that already.

2193

2194 **C6**

2195 Quite a lot. Yeah, definitely.

Commented [EL293]: *Feedback:* Non-verbal (general)

2196

2197 **RESEARCHER**

2198 Do you ever glare? Do you ever give people "the look"?

2199

2200 **C6**

2201 No, no, I don't think I do. Although as I'm just looking around the room, sometimes people
2202 have said, you looked at me, and I thought I had done it wrong. As far as I'm aware, I haven't
2203 meant to give the glare. Whether other people have thought that they had received that glare
2204 or not is a different matter.

2205

2206

2207 **RESEARCHER**

2208 Going back to targeting the right singers for feedback and you're addressing the section, so
2209 not to single anyone out, is there a time when you do have to address it on an individual
2210 basis?

2211

2212 **C6**

2213 I mean, I think again, because I've always relied on the huge numbers. Actually, that has
2214 enabled us to have within the choir, some people who wouldn't ever get into an auditioned
2215 choir. We've got one guy with his father, who was singing in the choir, a very good bass, and
2216 said "Look, my son would love this, but he won't be able to carry a tune in a bucket. I know
2217 that. Is it okay to bring him up?" I said "Yes, of course." And he did. And I gave him one-to-
2218 one lessons for a while to get him on pitch, but he was so off pitch and really loud. It was to
2219 the point where other choir members were complaining and wanting to leave as a result. That
2220 was a horrible situation.

2221

2222 **RESEARCHER**

2223 Can you think of any examples of feedback that you've given that has really stayed in your
2224 memory?

2225

2226 **C6**

2227 I certainly remember having to—

2228

2229 I did have to throw someone out of the choir, actually, he and I, again, tried for a long time,
2230 agonised over this decision. And it, but he was very, he was verbally quite aggressive. And
2231 he regularly made sexist and homophobic comments and jokes, and had numerous,
2232 numerous warnings. And then eventually, you know, and it was a long time as well, eventually
2233 just like my patience was done, "Please don't come back." And he behaved as if it was kind
2234 of, it was all my fault. And how dare I? Which actually was kind of helpful because I was able
2235 to go yeah, fuck you. Which, which made it nice and easy for me. But then I think because it
2236 had been such a long time as well. And I'd had so much evidence and I was able to say "I've
2237 got quite a lot of patience and actually, it's really worn thin now, I'm sorry it's too late. You've
2238 had your opportunities. I won't be asking you back."

2239

2240 **RESEARCHER**

2241 Yes, it is interesting how much of being a choral leader is people skills.

2242

2243 How do you approach the content of that final piece of advice that you give a choir before
2244 they go to perform?

2245

Commented [EL294]: *Feedback*: Understanding when to correct

Commented [EL295]: *Leadership characteristics*: People management

2246 **C6**

2247 All depends. All depends what the dress rehearsal was like (*laughs*). If the dress rehearsal
2248 was brilliant, I will say something along the lines of "If you sing half as well, as you did in the
2249 rehearsal today I'll be happy with that."

2250

2251 If there's bits that they are ropery on and I can tell they're nervous, I'll just go, "Do you know
2252 what, just enjoy yourselves. You'll get away with murder if you smile. The audience will forgive
2253 so much, if you make it fun for them. If you don't know that piece and you end up on the tune,
2254 who cares? You know, let's just do it to the best of our ability." I want them to go onstage
2255 feeling good.

2256

2257 **RESEARCHER**

2258 This is the final question, by the way, what sort of feedback do you give mid-performance?

2259

2260 **C6**

2261 Okay, so if something is brilliant, I will, you know, I will make a big, massive smile. If something
2262 goes wrong, I'll just make us laugh over it. If it screws up in performance, hey, nevermind,
2263 don't worry, we'll get the next bit, it's fine. And we kind of have a bit of a giggle about it and
2264 move on. It's such a different thing being involved in performance and for me, it's, it's the time
2265 and I've really noticed this, of course, since the pandemic, because we've only just done our
2266 first performances for the last two years, and we've just done some Christmas performances,
2267 all outdoors. But just getting that connection. Again, the connection that you have, of course,
2268 is really important when you're rehearsing, but of course, the stopping and starting and
2269 explaining this, and then going over that, let's do that again. But when you're in performance,
2270 and it's just the off we go, there's more of that silent communication, you don't get to stop.
2271 Occasionally, you might have to go "Watch me!" as they are going at their own pace or
2272 whatever. But again, it's usually just like that and they'll have a giggle about it.

2273

2274 So yeah, mid-performance, so some of it's visual, a lot of it's visual. And I smile as much as
2275 I can, you know, kind of and try and help them to feel good about it or also as well just make
2276 a joke about you know, if they're all looking miserable, and they are singing a really happy
2277 song, I just go (*pulls a face*) and then "Come on!" and it just makes them giggle.

2278

2279

Commented [EL296]: *Feedback*: Pre-performance feedback

Commented [EL297]: *Feedback*: Non-verbal (positive)

Commented [EL298]: *Feedback*: Use of humour

Commented [EL299]: *Leadership characteristics*:
Connection

Commented [EL300]: *Feedback*: Use of humour

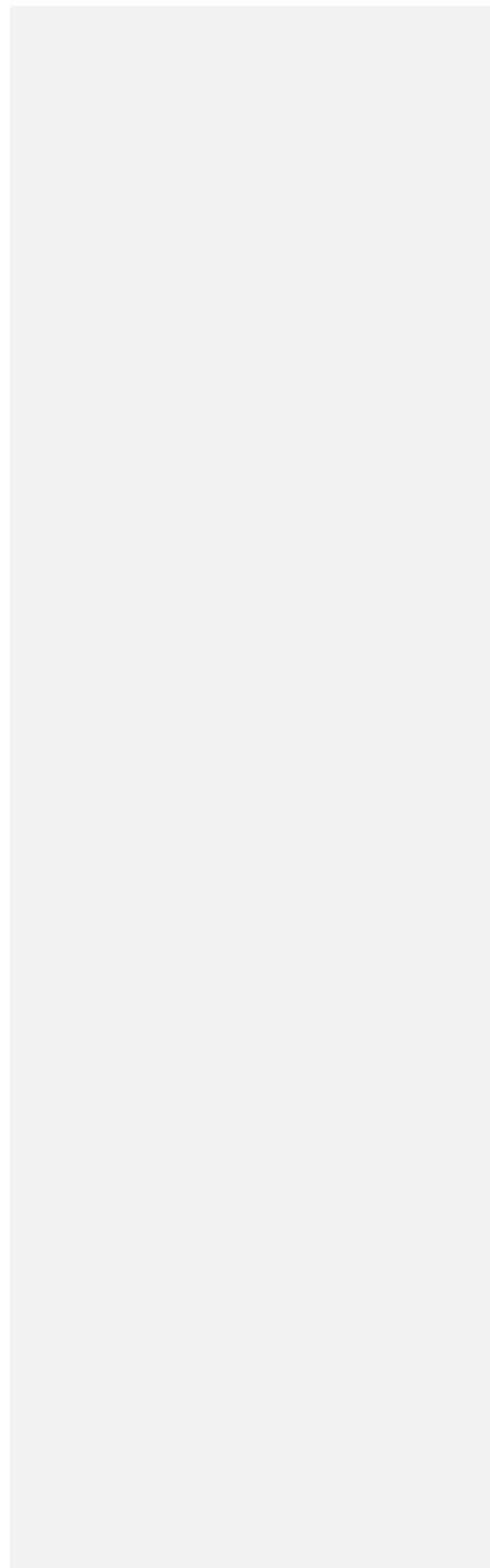
Commented [EL301]: *Feedback*: Non-verbal (negative)

2280 **RESEARCHER**

2281 Thank you so much, that's been really helpful.

2282

2283 - *End of interview* -



2284 **C7 Interview – 5 January 2022 1:30pm**

2285

2286 **RESEARCHER**

2287 Please could you describe all the choirs that you currently conduct.

2288

2289 **C7**

2290 [Choral society]: 180 or so, mixed ability, community choir chorus. [Symphonic chorus]:
2291 membership from around 180, but performing numbers between 90 and 120. Attached to the
2292 [symphony orchestra], so a professional-level amateur chorus. Six concerts a year during the
2293 season and anywhere up to six [performances] in the summer season. With [the choral
2294 society], it's four concerts in the season. And then [a professional chamber choir]: Projects
2295 that come in and out, nothing set and regular, with performing numbers usually between eight
2296 and 16.

2297

2298 **RESEARCHER**

2299 Thank you and please confirm details of any formal music education, whether that's lessons,
2300 exams, courses, etc.

2301

2302 **C7**

2303 Piano and violin grade eight, violin diploma: when I was at university I did a performing
2304 diploma outside, an ARCM. Then first degree at [university] and second degree Masters in
2305 Choral Conducting at [conservatoire]. And I did my grade eight singing, aged 39.

2306

2307 **RESEARCHER**

2308 How much would you say that education versus experience has contributed to your
2309 proficiency as a conductor?

2310

2311 **C7**

2312 I think it's very important to get the—, so my conducting education was not just my one year
2313 with [my professor] at [conservatoire], it was four or five summers at, what is now Sherborne
2314 Summer School, for a week or two each - technical stuff there and Association of British
2315 Choral Directors courses as well.

2316

2317

2318 **RESEARCHER**

2319 Was that always your plan?

2320

2321 **C7**

2322 To be a conductor? No. Sort of at university. It was an accident really that I got going. Because
2323 the Director of Music asked me to cover for a sabbatical. I had done a bit of conducting
2324 because I led the orchestra, so I'd done bits of sectionals at university and I directed one of
2325 the musicals as well so I had got started, but I was just flapping about really. I covered for a
2326 summer sabbatical term in the chapel, was flapping around, having a whale of a time, but
2327 realised I had no idea what I was doing. So signed up then, I saw during that term, I saw an
2328 advert for the Associated of British Choral Directors convention and signed up for a pre-
2329 convention conducting course and it just all went from there. That was the route in. And then
2330 yeah, I did those courses first and then plucked up the courage to apply for a Masters.

2331

2332 **RESEARCHER**

2333 And how would you describe your leadership style in the choirs that you run? And does it
2334 vary between the groups?

2335

2336 **C7**

2337 What are the leadership styles, what styles are there? I don't know.

2338

2339 **RESEARCHER**

2340 This is the question.

2341

2342 **C7**

2343 I don't know if I've ever thought about a leadership style. Hopefully you can tell that by the
2344 way, I'm sort of slightly flummoxed by the question. Because I haven't been on any kind of
2345 particular leadership courses. I've taken lots of advice over the years and I've watched how
2346 leaders who I admire operate in their fields, usually in music, but not specifically to do with
2347 conducting. So I wouldn't say I have a style that I've learned along the way about leadership.

2348

2349 My style in the rehearsals has changed as I've got older and wiser, yes that that has
2350 happened, but it always started with the music. It always started with a need to get to a point
2351 and always focused on people's enjoyment of the time. I've always been aware, because

Commented [EL302]: *Leadership characteristics:* Goal-orientated

Commented [EL303]: *Leadership characteristics:* Creating a positive experience

2352 I've been a keen amateur musician. You know, I loved playing in my youth orchestra and
2353 from that kind of thing. I've always been aware that, you know, you've got to love and enjoy
2354 what you're doing as part of the process, even though you do have something that you're
2355 aiming at.

2356
2357 I've got better as a leader, as I've got better as a conductor. All the technical aspects that just
2358 get easier over time and also the vocal knowledge that I've bolted on during the time as well.
2359 It makes it all easier.

2360
2361 But I know I've always, even though I haven't got things right (I mean, it'd be too traumatising
2362 to actually analyse one of my rehearsals 15 years ago or so), but I know I've always been
2363 focused on the understanding of where people are, that people come in from that whatever
2364 they've been doing in the day and then this is a particular focused activity that is away from
2365 what they've be doing in the day. Or there'll be people who, I mean, I know still with the
2366 [symphonic chorus] we've got one person who's a 24 hour carer for her partner, but she books
2367 time off and care in, so she can come to the rehearsals and that is her time that is her
2368 "completely forget about everything and get immersed in—". She's a music teacher by trade
2369 and singing teacher by trade and this is time when she gets to focus on something completely
2370 different, so I'm aware that there are lots of different reasons for coming into a rehearsal. So
2371 I've always been aware of that, but hopefully just a bit better at sort of putting all the pieces
2372 together than I was.

2373
2374 **RESEARCHER**

2375 How much of your education has been people management?

2376
2377 **C7**

2378 So there'll be little bits of the courses I've done, and certainly to do with my year at
2379 [conservatoire] with my professor, there was a lot of rehearsal and people management. And
2380 actually, I made a particular point when I was teaching at [conservatoire], when I was teaching
2381 choral conducting there, I made a particular point of that being wound into whatever they do
2382 in their lessons. I made them do movement coaching as well. So, you know, they had a
2383 movement coach i.e. how you present yourself, body language, that kind of thing as well. So
2384 I put that as part of what they did, as part of their course as well.

2385

Commented [EL304]: Leadership characteristics:
Technical skills

Commented [EL305]: Leadership characteristics: Vocal
pedagogy skills

Commented [EL306]: Leadership characteristics:
Understanding singers

Commented [EL307]: Leadership characteristics: People
management

Commented [EL308]: Leadership characteristics:
Rehearsal management

Commented [EL309]: Leadership characteristics:
Communication

2386 So nothing formalised in terms of leadership skills, but I realised I needed those, so I sought
2387 advice from particular people I admired and I wouldn't say, it was as formalised as a
2388 mentorship, but I had to really step up when I got the [symphonic chorus] job on that. I had
2389 to step up. And there were a couple of particular sources I tapped into for advice because
2390 that was a lot about change management and how to take people with you. What the
2391 important things were to focus on, the direction you wanted to head in, and that it's not
2392 necessarily a straight line: the direction you take, but you sort of zigzag across the line. And,
2393 you know, and all that, that kind of understanding that I suppose one had gathered elements
2394 of over time with enough self-awareness and watching other people, but I specifically sought
2395 out advice at that point.

Commented [EL310]: Leadership characteristics: Self-development

Commented [EL311]: Leadership characteristics: People management

Commented [EL312]: Leadership characteristics: Self-reflection

Commented [EL313]: Leadership characteristics: Observant

2397 RESEARCHER

2398 In thinking about your role of leading choirs, whether in rehearsal or in performance, or in
2399 those bits in between, please can you describe the different skills that you need to be able to
2400 do that effectively?

2402 C7

2403 I also find it really fascinating, and it's why I love what I do as a chorus master as well. So
2404 there's another element in that that is added in, but in terms of if you're directing the concert
2405 as well, now, my number one is simply focus on the fact that it is a positive experience. If you
2406 are completely focused on that, then all the other things that come into it, will look after
2407 themselves more often than not. And when I say positive experience, I don't mean "Oh well,
2408 everything is marvellous. Well done everyone." when things need tweaking. It's just it helps
2409 you focus on the things that might need tweaking. If you're focused on it being a positive
2410 experience overall, and that helps you get through your rehearsal and it helps you not to
2411 worry about things that are not every little thing and this is in the lead up to a performance as
2412 well. Not every little thing, but gradually putting the building blocks in.

Commented [EL314]: Leadership characteristics: Different roles

Commented [EL315]: Leadership characteristics: Creating a positive experience

2414 And yeah, I suppose the stress points look after themselves much more. When you are
2415 focused on being positive with whatever you do. The pinch points, come say in the week of
2416 the concert, you might have a couple of rehearsals and then on the day itself. Those are the
2417 pinch points. That's when people start to, you know, get excited, but also nervous. Are we
2418 ready? Are we ready? Well, if you've done the work beforehand, if you've done a sensible
2419 rehearsal schedule--.

Commented [EL316]: Leadership characteristics: Goal-orientated

Commented [EL317]: Leadership characteristics: Organisational/planning skills

2420

2421 If it is demanding and they are struggling at the beginning then you say "Don't worry, just go
2422 with me. I'll show you the way through but it's my responsibility, don't worry." Or you say "I've
2423 given you a challenge this time, don't worry, next concert, you know, you'll fly through." And
2424 I mean, then that goes into how you programme anyway. If the communication is good about
2425 how you programme, why you programme things, or that you're not necessarily going to get
2426 a complete mix within one season, but if you look one season previously and one season
2427 ahead then you will get a complete mix of what you might want to be doing. It's those kinds
2428 of things, everything is the communication and the positive experience. And the little things
2429 will look after themselves.

2430

2431 As a chorus master, I love the fact that you're around amazing soloists, amazing conductors,
2432 world class conductors and you're responsible for a huge part of what's going on in that
2433 concert. And you have to learn how different conductors like to work with their chorus director
2434 and some will want you listening and balancing, some will want you up there next to them,
2435 some will want you doing both. Some will give you the time naturally, they will say "Do you
2436 want to say anything?" Others you have to listen for their, sort of their, speech patterns or
2437 where the cadence is coming at the end of a sentence and work out whether, if they are going
2438 back, you just jump in and say one tiny thing that will make it better for everybody when they
2439 do that repeat or whether, if they're going on, you just make a note and you give notes out
2440 later. That sort of relationship I find fascinating and knowing I can play a part and help them
2441 as well. But every conductor is different. There aren't so many that are very difficult to work
2442 with. It's just you have to gauge how they like to work.

2443

2444 **RESEARCHER**

2445 I want to come on to talk about praise and criticism and that balance, but first, how important
2446 do you think gesturing is?

2447

2448 **C7**

2449 It's really important because that's how you communicate, how you hear the music is through
2450 your body. So the alignment of your body with your gesture is what they see. And that's all a
2451 part of how they see how you feel and hear the music. So yes, it's absolutely vital in the sense
2452 of the technical side and how you transmit, how you hear the music, and the better one is at
2453 that, the quicker you get results. Definitely, even just to do with ensemble and tidiness. If your

Commented [EL318]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Programming skills

Commented [EL319]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Communication

Commented [EL320]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Managing perspective

Commented [EL321]: *Leadership characteristics:* Aural
skills

Commented [EL322]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Adaptable

Commented [EL323]: *Leadership characteristics:* Reading
the room

Commented [EL324]: *Feedback:* Understanding when to
correct

2454 gesture is clear, and it's all connected to the breath, then all of those things will look after
2455 themselves in a much more efficient way. So that's efficiency in not only how you use your
2456 body, so you're not sort of cranking your shoulder out every rehearsal, but it's efficiency to
2457 deal with time in rehearsal as well. So yes, gesture and communication.

Commented [EL325]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Conducting/gesturing skills

2458
2459 And then, after that, in a rehearsal it's ebb and flow. So you've asked about criticism or, you
2460 know, the dynamics of praise and criticism. Yeah, that has to have its own rhythm as well.
2461 And it's easy to sort of go down a route and just get stuck, and everybody gets stuck. But
2462 actually, if you're aware of the ebb and flow and the pace at which you're working, but also
2463 the balance between intensity of demand. I mean, I would say the only time where the
2464 criticism will come out is if there's a situation where I don't feel that everybody is pulling the
2465 same weight. So it would just be a demand and it'd be energy levels.

Commented [EL326]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Communication

Commented [EL327]: *Leadership characteristics:*
Rehearsal management

Commented [EL328]: *Feedback:* Change of focus/energy
required

Commented [EL329]: *Feedback:* Negative feedback

2467 But when I do that it is always with the understanding that people will have different energy
2468 levels because the time of year it is, the time of day it is or whatever. So, I always have a
2469 safety switch, not a safety switch to do with, you know, anger management, but the safety
2470 switch that is empathy. So yes, I am allowed to demand because you get results when you
2471 demand and if you are justified in what you are saying and you're in control of what you're
2472 saying, then that's fine, because that can give a, you know, a pep up and a change in energy.
2473 But then there is still the point that you know, is that lull in energy because I haven't actually
2474 quite got the rehearsal pace or schedule right? So, you know, there are all these things,
2475 they're not anxieties because if you worry about them all, then you'll get nowhere, but there's
2476 the failsafe, there's the checks and balances. So yes, I will demand, but the criticism is usually
2477 a demand of positive energy, that they need to give more energy, they'll get the results much
2478 quicker that way. So that's still to do with ebb and flow and balance in rehearsal.

Commented [EL330]: *Feedback:* Empathy

Commented [EL331]: *Feedback:* Challenging/demanding

Commented [EL332]: *Leadership characteristics:* Self-
reflection

Commented [EL333]: *Feedback:* Balanced approach

2479
2480 **RESEARCHER**

2481 And what do you think the balance should be between praise and criticism in an average
2482 rehearsal? Does that vary between groups as well?

2483
2484 **C7**

2485 I don't necessarily think of things as praise versus criticism. [The choral society], who are a
2486 really well run choir, who I absolutely adore. You know, one of those choirs and there aren't

Commented [EL334]: *Feedback:* Not viewed as praise vs
criticism

2487 many of them, that I'd really happily and would say it's a privilege to sit down with any member
2488 of that choir and have a really lovely conversation. You know, it's just, they're wonderful and
2489 they've just got used to me now saying, "Yeah, good. Well done. That's great. Now," and
2490 then, you know, you sort of say, "Yes, that's better", or 'Yeah, we're going to have another go
2491 because I think we could do better", whatever. So it's not a negative and they just smile and
2492 they laugh, and that's fine. So I don't think of it as praise versus criticism, but I will be aware
2493 of the length of time in a rehearsal where I've been demanding for a long period. And a long
2494 period of time is 15 minutes. You know, you need to change the energy and then, if I'm
2495 challenging them on a particular area, over a period of a few weeks, or over a term I'll refer
2496 them back to that and say this is why we're doing what we're doing, this needs to be better,
2497 remember this, let's go on that. All these skills are mostly as a result of self-reflection, and
2498 reflection over a period of time.

Commented [EL335]: *Feedback*: Managing culture

Commented [EL336]: *Feedback*: Change of focus/energy required

Commented [EL337]: *Feedback*: Providing an explanation

Commented [EL338]: *Leadership characteristics*: Self-reflection

2500 **RESEARCHER**

2501 Interesting.

2502

2503 **C7**

2504 You know them as kind of an abstract thing you're taught. When I was studying on the ABCD
2505 courses, at [conservatoire] with [my professor], it's on a syllabus or you'd have a class on it
2506 or you'd have a bit of a mentoring session on a rehearsal that you'd done and you made
2507 notes and you know those abstract things. But it's only over time that you begin to understand.
2508 Oh, yeah, that's what that means when that is happening. And your general demeanour and
2509 sort of solution-finding skills are enabled by time and experience, but also how you feel about
2510 yourself with your own level of conducting.

2511

2512 **RESEARCHER**

2513 When you give feedback to a choir, how do you target the relevant singers?

2514

2515 **C7**

2516 Where do I start with this? Really interesting. Let's talk about the situation of the one singer
2517 or two singers, that I've learned that it has to be managed by process. So if you have a regular
2518 audition, re-audition, feedback session where you can give honest and constructive and
2519 purposeful feedback then that's where you address those situations. So if you're seeing them
2520 every two years/every three years in that kind of a situation, that's when you can give that

Commented [EL339]: *Feedback*: Establishing/utilising processes

2521 kind of feedback. And you couch it in positive language because, you know, they may be one
2522 of your most loyal and most attentive singers at rehearsals, and so you can talk to them
2523 honestly and openly and say thank you for the amazing contribution that they've made. And
2524 then say, however, or this is what I've noticed in rehearsals, is there anything I can do to help
2525 you with that? And you can still say, because I need this to be like this. Is that something we
2526 can think about or work on together or anything like that and you can have those
2527 conversations every two/three years. So that should happen by process.

Commented [EL340]: *Feedback*: Creating a positive experience

2528
2529 But if you're in rehearsal, you can't go to an individual. For me now, it's a lockdown no-no.
2530 But it's taken me a while to get there. I certainly didn't do it very often. And even with the best
2531 intentions, it's now a no-no, because it's much easier. You say, I'm just losing contact with
2532 the second and third row of altos. Fine, that's all. Generally, you will know the ones, who are
2533 bang on it anyway, will just go well that's alright, that's not me, but I have an idea who he's
2534 talking to.

Commented [EL341]: *Feedback*: No individual feedback in front of choir

Commented [EL342]: *Feedback*: Diplomatic

2535
2536 **RESEARCHER**

2537 Do you think in a smaller choir you could build a culture where it would be acceptable?

2538
2539 **C7**

2540 Yeah. That takes time to develop on trust. But yeah, yeah. And again, it's easier for people
2541 to take criticism like that or more direct feedback like that because you're in a smaller
2542 environment. It's the diminishing of the embarrassment factor if it's done in the right way.
2543 You're amongst a group of people, 24, whatever, who trust each other. Yeah.

Commented [EL343]: *Feedback*: Building trust

2544
2545 **RESEARCHER**

2546 And what about in the professional setting?

2547
2548 **C7**

2549 So no, it's alright. Again, if you're professional about the way you do it, no that's fine. Because
2550 sometimes in [the professional chamber choir] it's one to a part. I also work with [another
2551 professional choir] as well, and you shouldn't be afraid to say, actually I need this like this, as
2552 far as I can hear I need this adjustment. That's fine.

2553
2554 **RESEARCHER**

2555 And how important is it for choral conductors to have a knowledge of vocal technique?

2556

2557 **C7**

2558 I would say it's absolutely paramount. Now I know what I know, it's made me a much better
2559 conductor. You don't have to know everything. And I think a good general base of knowledge
2560 of how to fix things is great because then you're not worried about fixing everybody's voice
2561 because you can't do that. But the basics, yes the basics of good singing technique,
2562 absolutely paramount. And vocal exercises are called warm-ups, but vocal exercises that are
2563 related to just the fundamentals of good singing technique. Absolutely paramount.

2564

2565 **RESEARCHER**

2566 And are there any particularly notable traits that you think good conductors have?

2567

2568 **C7**

2569 Empathy. Yeah, it starts with that, as well as their musicality. You know, how they, how they
2570 express themselves, both verbally and non-verbally, but empathy. And empathy doesn't just
2571 mean that they're lovely and nice. It means their understanding of the situation as a whole,
2572 so the best conductors will understand the difference between working with [the symphonic
2573 chorus] in the piano rehearsal (so just piano and chorus) and then the difference between
2574 working with them when the orchestra is in there as well.

2575

2576 **RESEARCHER**

2577 Just one last question, please. How do you approach that final piece of advice that you give
2578 before they go out to perform?

2579

2580 **C7**

2581 Two different ways: With [the choral society], the energy of that final rehearsal into just a
2582 positive word at the end and just say go out and enjoy it.

2583

2584 That's easier with the [symphonic chorus], sometimes it's the only chance you get to give
2585 them some notes. But those notes, especially at the final one, so say, we've got two orchestral
2586 rehearsals. After the first one, if I've got a couple of short notes to give them and the
2587 rehearsal's finished early enough, I'll just say hang on two minutes and I'll give them a couple

Commented [EL344]: *Leadership characteristics:* Vocal pedagogy skills

Commented [EL345]: *Leadership characteristics:* Empathy

Commented [EL346]: *Leadership characteristics:* Musicality

Commented [EL347]: *Feedback:* Pre-performance feedback

2588 of notes then. If I know I've got a few more, I'll send them out on an email, so they can write
2589 them in for the next rehearsal.

2590

2591 After the final rehearsal before a concert, I try to keep it as short as possible because they
2592 can't take on any extra information. It is unfair to load them with a whole list of things. So it's
2593 just the wrong energy. And actually, that's one of the big things I had to get them over from
2594 the previous regime was that, you know, after the final rehearsal they were given a ton of
2595 things that were wrong. And so I keep it brief.

2596

2597 [Specific choral work]: they were doing really well, they were distanced, so a metre apart. So
2598 all the focus on that and enjoying singing in that space that they had and they could sing out.
2599 I said, you know, throughout the rehearsal period, that they're doing really well. That [the
2600 conductor of the symphony orchestra] is really happy. I said, "I need one thing from you: the
2601 opening chorus, as far as I'm concerned, is still dull. Everything else, I can hear every single
2602 word, but the opening chorus is dull." I just said it like that. I said, "I understand because the
2603 dynamics are *pianissimo* and the music moves slowly and it's sort of a bit *misterioso*, so I can
2604 see what you're doing. But as a result of it being dull, it comes across as flat. What you need
2605 to do is just magnify everything. Almost, sort of slightly overact on what you're doing. And
2606 that's all I need. Chorus number one is for you to tell the story and draw everybody in."

2607

2608 **RESEARCHER**

2609 Did it work?

2610

2611 **C7**

2612 Absolutely amazing. It was completely different to how I'd heard—. Now, part of that is my
2613 responsibility because I hadn't quite—. We'd rehearsed it, I'd tuned it, I told them what, you
2614 know, what it was all about and we'd addressed a few things and you know, technical things.
2615 You know, anticipating consonants, so the vowels speak on the beat, all those kinds of things
2616 we'd done, but I still felt a bit of responsibility that if I'm having to say this still right now, that
2617 that's something I've missed. And perhaps the one thing I had missed was just to be honest
2618 with them and say it's dull. And they certainly did something about it. And that's fine because
2619 that was the one thing that stayed with them. I didn't give them a whole list of everything else.
2620 And in fact, of course, the list had largely disappeared. But I just said "It's sounding dull, it
2621 just needs to be much more engaging and you need to draw them in." Fine, no problem.

Commented [EL348]: *Feedback*: Pre-performance feedback

Commented [EL349]: *Feedback*: Appreciation

Commented [EL350]: *Feedback*: One requirement at a time

Commented [EL351]: *Feedback*: Empathy

Commented [EL352]: *Leadership characteristics*: Taking responsibility

Commented [EL353]: *Feedback*: Honesty

2622 Because I built up, over time, trust and when I say something like that, it hits home and I
2623 mean it and also that I'm not blaming them. It's just how it is. And any conductor's comments
2624 they were taking really personally and it was an affront if the conductor was saying something
2625 that wasn't quite right, that you know, it was my fault, because, you know, I put them in that
2626 situation. It's just process. And the conductors understand process and it's towards
2627 performance.

2628

2629 **RESEARCHER**

2630 Fascinating. Thank you. It's been really helpful.

2631

2632 - End of interview -

Commented [EL354]: *Feedback:* Building trust

Commented [EL355]: *Feedback:* Negative feedback (high magnitude)

Commented [EL356]: *Feedback:* Not blaming singers