

Supervision in coaching: systematic literature review

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Abstract

Coaching supervision as a field of knowledge is at an early stage of development, even in comparison to the discipline of coaching. To support and stimulate further progress of the field, this fully inclusive literature review aims to create a comprehensive map of the themes and directions in contemporary publications on coaching supervision. Through the synthesis of findings in 68 selected sources we identified four main themes: clarifying the concept of coaching supervision; the state of theoretical development demonstrated in the literature; the value attributed to supervision; and the nature of the current use of the supervision in the field. Based on our analysis we generate potential directions for further research, conceptualisation and theory building.

Coaching supervision: An Introduction

The field of coaching supervision has shifted unrecognisably even in the last five years. Supervision is now an established practice supported by most of the recognised professional bodies and served by a growing cohort of practitioners with specialised training. Organisations often demand that the coaches they contract to should be in supervision. As a result, the whole coaching industry is rapidly changing its attitude to supervision. The most noticeable and welcome change that has happened in the last decade is the significant growth of the coaching discipline (Bachkirova, 2017; Grant, 2017). This growth, by extension, is reflected in the growth of literature and research on coaching supervision. It could be said that coaching supervision is now emerging as a discipline in its own right. As we will demonstrate, however, there is a shortage in the literature of publications that provide robust conceptual foundations for the various strands of this developing field with a clear commitment to an academically rigorous, fully referenced and evidence-based approach.

It is important to recognise that the existing literature on supervision in counselling and psychotherapy, although useful in some regard, is not fully applicable to the developing discipline of coaching supervision. This limitation stems from the differences between coaching and psychotherapy practices in the first place (Crowe, 2017; Bachkirova & Baker, 2018). During the last decade coaching modalities have extended from an individual to individual relationship to a relationship with groups, teams, and even ‘teams of teams’ or organisations. The focus on the client, typical in psychotherapy, is argued to be insufficient without consideration of the systems and subsystems around them (Gray, 2007, 2017). As coaching becomes more systemic, the nature of supervision for such coaching needs to be explored in its own right. Many difficult questions that are asked in relation to coaching (e.g. ‘who is the client, when multiple stakeholders are involved?’) become all the more pertinent when brought to supervision. As coaches adjust their practice according to the needs of organisations, so supervisors have to adapt their approaches, too. One potential issue with the literature on coaching supervision in this regard is that published sources are responding to the needs of the industry more slowly than the industry itself is developing. In this situation the professional bodies have taken the initiative in defining the nature of coach supervision, its purpose and what its functions should be. They often do this, however, without any evidence of a substantial conceptual underpinning that would normally be a feature of the peer-reviewed literature.

The current situation, in summary, indicates that researchers and academics need to respond faster to the needs of a growing industry. One way to promote and shape research

and conceptual work is through comprehensive literature reviews. This work allows a broader view on the published sources and offers an analysis of gaps with appropriate recommendations. However, the only literature review on coaching supervision that has been published so far is Moyes (2009). Although Moyes raises a number of important concerns in terms of conceptualising coaching supervision, the situation has changed significantly in recent years and there is a need for a more inclusive up-to-date systematic literature review.

This, then, is the motivation for this review. Its aim is to support and stimulate further development of the field and to create a comprehensive map of the themes and tendencies in all relevant publications on coaching supervision. More specifically the research questions are as follows:

1. to examine and explicate themes/constructs emerging from publications on coaching supervision;
2. to identify concepts, questions and research methodologies that are important for the development of knowledge on coaching supervision.

We made the following decisions in terms of providing a working definition for key concepts. The complexity of this task in relation to coaching supervision was such that it became one of the themes of this review itself. To define coaching for the purpose of having clear inclusion criteria (to exclude, e.g. sport coaching) we adopted a definition from the Complete Handbook of Coaching as an established text in coaching education, namely:

Coaching is a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the client and potential for other stakeholders (Bachkirova, Cox and Clutterbuck, 2010, p.1).

In the remainder of this paper, we describe first our methodological approach to this review including our search strategy, inclusion criteria, dataset and our approach to the analysis of emergent themes. Then we describe and discuss four main themes/constructs. Finally, on the basis of these discussions, we generate potential directions for further research, conceptualisation and theory building.

Methods of review

The most appropriate approach for conducting a systematic literature review is to some extent dependent on the state of knowledge in the field under consideration. In this respect, among the types of review described by The Cochrane foundation, *Qualitative* review was considered most appropriate. Qualitative reviews are those “that aim to synthesize qualitative evidence to address questions on aspects of interventions other than effectiveness” (‘About Cochrane Reviews, n.d.). In general, a systematic literature review (SLR) aims to identify, critically evaluate and integrate data from relevant publications in order to address the research question. Trying to locate more specific guidelines for addressing our research question we considered three different approaches to literature review: knowledge-building and theory-generating qualitative systematic review (Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson, 2013), meta-aggregation (Hannes & Lockwood, 2011) and scoping study (Arksy & O’Malley, 2005). Each of these approaches has at least one element that is relevant and useful to our review question. The following is a description of the method that we created by adapting such elements from each approach.

The purpose of knowledge building from Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson (2013) was seen as most suitable, but the step of theory-building requires expansive search, establishing interconnections between concepts and is, therefore, premature for the state of knowledge on coaching supervision. The meta-aggregation approach (Hannes & Lockwood, 2011) similarly has the aim of the synthesis of knowledge using an exhaustive search which is suitable for our task, but it ends with the production of the synthesized statements that inform decision-

making at a clinical or policy level. This was deemed excessive for our research questions and could only lead to specific recommendations for further research. Consequently, we followed a combined method that was also enhanced by ideas from scoping studies (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) which include: a) clarifying the purpose and research question; b) balancing focus with breadth and comprehensiveness of the review; c) using an iterative team approach to selecting and evaluating studies; d) extracting data for qualitative thematic analysis; e) reporting results with the implications for further research (see Fig. 1).

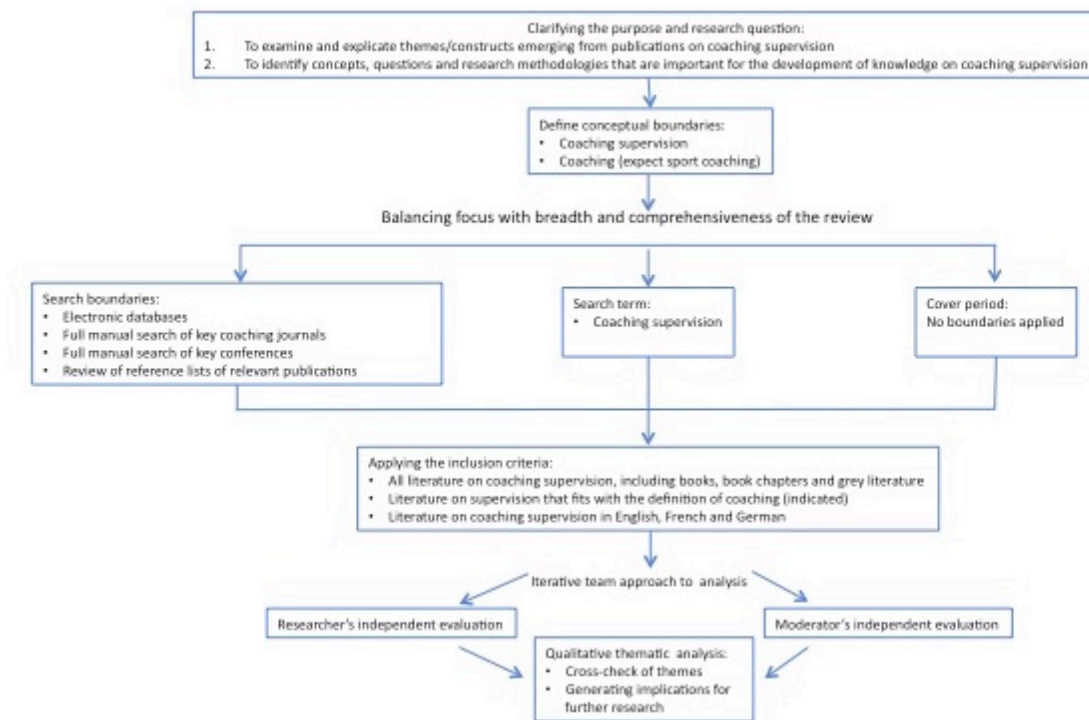


Figure 1 Systematic Literature Review Method

Literature search

The literature search for this topic had two major challenges. The first is related to the immaturity of coaching supervision as a field of knowledge. The second is concerned with the main driving force of publications, insofar as the majority of the work in this field is done by practitioners rather than academics and researchers. The implication of the first challenge was that returns from electronic databases on “coaching supervision” were very limited. Even with the addition of full manual searches of key coaching journals, full manual searches of key conferences and following the reference lists of relevant publications, it could fairly be said that in terms of the published literature this field is under-developed. Considering this, we might be open to critique of not expanding the search term. We would argue that our tightly scoped search strategy was justified because of the potential issue of multiple conceptualizations of the term of coaching, and consequently, supervision of coaches, in different and largely unrelated fields. For example, including supervision of sport coaching would be misleading as sport coaching is a different industry with different criteria of quality of practice and different approach to CPD of practitioners.

The implication of the second challenge (the predominance of literature driven by practitioner interests), is the fact that practitioners are not inclined to struggle through the labour-intensive process of publishing in peer-refereed journals. Hence the majority of our

returns were books, book chapters, conference presentations, reports produced by professional bodies and other commercial organisations – a category of literature that is classified as grey (Adams et al, 2017). Although this literature serves the world of practice it has limitations in demonstrating rigour and therefore required an extra effort in terms of establishing eligibility. It is important to say, at the same time, that the field is rapidly developing, and we identified a significant number of publications in progress or under discussion between colleagues that appear important. This search has been done between June 2019 and January 2020.

Inclusion criteria

Inclusion in the literature review was based on three main criteria: 1) all literature, including books, book chapters and grey literature that indicates coaching supervision in the titles and/or abstract of the publication; 2) the literature on coaching supervision that fits with the definition of coaching that we described in the Introduction to this paper; 3) the literature on coaching supervision in English, French and German as the most representative in terms of discussing coaching supervision at this stage.

The first criterion suggests that we included the literature on coaching supervision that considered coaching delivered outside of organisational or workplace context. Although the majority of the academic literature tends to focus on coaching in this context, grey literature on coaching supervision tends not to exclude support for coaching provided in other contexts, such as family, community, health, education, etc. and is therefore included. However, literature associated with sport coaching has been excluded as explained in the previous section.

In relation to grey literature we followed the recommendations for inclusion by Adams et al (2017) and included sources characterised by significant retrievability and credibility. This decision was based on the aim of increasing the relevance and impact of the review for both scholars and practitioners and also helps to increase our understanding of coaching supervision as a complex and emergent practice. Furthermore, in a field that is so much in need of conceptual understanding, it would be unwise to exclude contributions that represent reasonable attempts to do just that. However, articles in coaching magazines were not generally included as such rationale is not usually provided. In addition, any grey literature included should be retrievable and thus open to being followed up by interested users.

No exclusion has been made on the basis of the date of publication. This was particularly important for articles in the peer-refereed journals, as some early publications offer otherwise rare examples of empirical studies. At the same time, white papers and guidelines developed by professional bodies were restricted to the most recent versions in preference to earlier iterations of these through time. The only exception to this rule is the report published by CIPD (2006) because of its historical significance and its importance for comparison in terms of the use of coaching supervision.

All types of study were included in the analysis: conceptual papers, qualitative and quantitative studies. This decision was based not only on scarcity of empirical studies but also following Nolan & Garavan (2016) and Denyer & Tranfield (2009), who recommend drawing these sources together and according to whom a synthesis of findings should achieve what may not be identifiable in each individual source. Conceptual work, in this case, can play an important role of connectivity and integration.

Data set

The initial formal search procedure identified 699 records. 631 items were excluded by reference to the abstract under the following conditions:

- where the use of the two terms was coincidental (e.g. a study comparing the impact of coaching, instruction and clinical supervision);
- where the reference to supervision related to the managerial function, or the uptake/use of supervision was incidental in a study focusing on coaching itself;
- where the use of the term coaching was in a clinical context and therefore supervision was understood to have been supervision of specialists in that discipline rather than coaching specialists;
- duplicates;
- secondary reports and reviews of primary materials;
- news reports;
- editorials outlining the contents of journals.

This left 68 items from the primary search, consisting of:

- 4 book chapters
- 1 conference paper
- 1 monograph
- 20 short articles in periodicals
- 42 peer reviewed papers

Following Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson's (2013) recommendation of iterative data analysis, additional sources arising from analysis of the initial selection were added as the analysis progressed. Manual searches of key coaching journals (International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring; Coaching: An international journal of theory, research and practice; International Coaching Psychology Review) and research-oriented conferences also generated a further 46 relevant items. This also produced more materials in French and German that were not identified in the database search. The additional items consisted of:

- 16 additional peer reviewed papers
- 11 additional monographs
- 8 additional collections (from which relevant chapters have been drawn)
- 9 additional 'grey' items (policy reports, white papers etc.)

The functionality of a tool such RevMan as recommended by the Cochrane Handbook (Higgins et al, 2019) was considered to be over-specified for the current task, and a customised shared repository was developed using the Airtable platform (www.airtable.com).

Initial reading of items was distributed around the review team. With the aim described in the previous section, coding for constructs was not undertaken. Rather, we sought only to identify the type of literature, theme and purpose, methodology and contribution to knowledge. A descriptive assessment of quality was also captured. From the extracted descriptions of theme and purpose, the team separately, and then collaboratively agreed the thematic headings in which the remainder of this review is organised.

Primary authors were nominated for each theme, who made an independent judgment of which papers to include in the discussion. In addition, the initial readers of each paper also selected those they considered relevant to be included for each theme. Subsequently, each drafted section was cross reviewed by the whole team in order to ensure that all necessary material had been included (within the constraints of brevity). This method meant that all papers had been assessed in their own right, integrated into the analytical narrative, and cross-checked by several members of the team.

Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson (2013) identify the main threats to the validity of a review such as the current one as being either too broad, or too narrow a literature base. The extent of the literature sourced in this case has allowed both a comprehensive scope and collaborative analysis to be achieved. We note one important caveat in this respect, however. There is an extensive literature on both supervision and systemic perspectives written in

German. However, the explicit conceptualisation of “coaching supervision” is almost entirely absent in the German literature. Due to the developmental history of the concepts of supervision and coaching, supervision tends to be discussed more generically as part of the helping professions. Consequently, some literature on supervision in German was excluded.

Results and discussion

In this section we describe and discuss four themes/constructs identified from the synthesis of the literature, which are:

1. Clarifying the concept of coaching supervision
2. Theoretical development demonstrated in the literature
3. The value of supervision
4. The use of the supervision

1. Clarifying the concept of supervision

Defining coaching supervision

The task of clarifying the concept of supervision is undertaken in different ways in the literature. Peer-reviewed papers, where supervision is explicitly defined, typically cite from well-known existing sources (e.g. Hawkins & Smith, 2013; Hay, 2007). Books on coaching supervision rarely treat definition as problematic. Some books do not offer a working definition of their own (eg de Haan, 2012; Murdoch & Arnold, 2013; Turner & Palmer, 2019). In other books definition is offered in a style of ‘coaching supervision *is...*’ with different degrees of justification for the definition provided (Hawkins & Smith, 2006; Hay, 2007; Cochrane & Newton, 2018). A further category includes books that acknowledge the issue of defining this practice, but resolve it in one of two different ways. Clutterbuck, Whitaker & Lucas (2016), for example, combine a number of definitions in one, while Bachkirova, Jackson & Clutterbuck (2011) introduce a range of definitions as examples, suggesting that the reader should make up their own mind, using examples for some boundary and scope. There is also grey literature that includes documentation of various professional bodies who take the initiative to offer their own definition of coaching supervision and in some case attaching competences frameworks (e.g. EMCC).

Before giving more specific examples of definitions, we would like to highlight that the approach to defining coaching supervision is not as simple as it might appear to be. The same problem was identified in relation to coaching itself where Bachkirova and Kauffman (2009) argued that the problem defining coaching is not just semantic but goes much deeper and is potentially impossible to solve. Although Moyes (2009) uses the lack of agreement in defining coaching supervision as a ‘game-breaker’ for the field – the absence of a clearer understanding of the boundaries makes the practice difficult to defend - the reason for this situation may also need to be made clear. Developing a good definition requires the use of two criteria: universality and uniqueness (Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2009). The first criterion implies that all approaches to coaching supervision should share the common features inherent in the definition; the second implies that no other practices would fit within it. Existing definitions of coaching supervision do not seem to satisfy these criteria.

At the current time, approaches to define coaching supervision seem to follow two strategies: the first one is to give a substantial number of details to include participants, purpose, process and beneficiaries of this practice evidently trying to satisfy the criteria of uniqueness. For example:

The process by which a coach/mentor/consultant with the help of the supervisor, who is not working directly with the client, can attend to understanding better both the client system and themselves as part of the client-coach/mentor system, and transform their work (Hawkins & Smith, 2013, p147).

The main driver here is to differentiate coaching supervision from counselling supervision. However, the number of details included makes it difficult to satisfy the criteria of universality. For example, not all coaching supervisors approve of the ambition to transform someone else's work and their purpose might be more modest than that specified. Similarly, Hodge (2013) is even more precise in defining what are the key functions and expected outcomes of supervision, creating more of an elaborate description rather than definition:

A co-created learning relationship that supports the supervisee in his or her development, both personally and professionally, and seeks to support him or her in providing best practice to his or her client. Through the process of reflecting on his or her work in supervision, the supervisee can review and develop his or her practice and re-energise themselves. It offers a forum to attend to his or her emotional and professional wellbeing and growth. Through the relationship and dialog in this alliance, coaches can receive feedback, broaden their perspectives, generate new ideas and maintain standards of effective practice (Hodge, 2016, p89).

Definitions from professional bodies tend to fall in the same category. For example, the following is offered as a definition of coaching supervision by the Association for Coaching:

Coaching Supervision is a formal and protected time for facilitating in-depth reflection for coaches to discuss their work with someone who is experienced as a Coach. Supervision offers a confidential framework within a collaborative working relationship in which the practice, tasks, process and challenges of the coaching work can be explored.

The primary functions of Coaching Supervision are to support, develop and ensure ethical and best practice of coaches in service of their coaching clients (individuals and organisations) and their professional associations. Supervision is not a 'policing' role, but rather a trusting and collegial professional relationship (Association for Coaching, 2019, p3).

A second strategy in defining coaching supervision is to focus on the most essential elements of the practice and to be as concise as possible. This approach more easily satisfies the criterion of universality, but struggles to meet the criterion of uniqueness, as many other supervisory practices would share the same elements. For example:

Supervision is a forum where supervisees review and reflect on their work in order to do it better (Carroll, 2007, p433).

Coaching supervision is for helping coaches to see more than they can currently see in their work (Bachkirova, 2008, p16).

With regard to these difficulties, it is important to recognise that no attempt so far has been made to arrive at a definition of coaching supervision empirically. This is a fruitful area for development and the needs for further research. At the same time the situation is not as dire as Moyes (2009) implied, because the current work in this field indicates that the conceptualisation of coaching supervision is subject to current and ongoing inquiry. According to the wisdom that 'proper enquiry doesn't start with the definition; you end up with it', the emerging discipline of coaching supervision at least has its priorities right.

Main functions of supervision

A dominant theme in the conceptualisation of coaching supervision is the articulation of its main functions. These usually include:

- Developing the competence and capability of the coach / mentor.
- Providing a supportive space for the coach / mentor to process the experiences they have had when working with clients.
- Encouraging professional practice related to quality, standards and ethics.

The terminology used to describe these general functions vary slightly through the literature:

Support: This function is referred to as *Restorative* (Proctor 1986), *Supportive* (Hawkins & Shohet 2012, Kadushin 1992, Hay 2007) or *Resourcing* (Hawkins & Smith 2013). Support is not seen as in-depth psychotherapeutic intervention, but a way to help the coach ensure self-care when the relationship with the client has been unsatisfactory or distressing.

Development: This function is referred to as *Formative* (Proctor 1986), *Educative* (Hawkins & Shohet 2012) or *Developmental* (Kadushin 1992, Hawkins & Smith 2013). It covers several aspects of professional development: reflecting on the coach's work and helping the coach to comply with indicators of the professional bodies' competency frameworks. This also considers how the coach might develop, for instance from individual coaching to team coaching.

Professional Assurance: This function is referred to as *Normative* (Proctor 1986), *Managerial* (Hawkins & Shohet 2012), *Administrative* (Kadushin 1992) or *Qualitative* (Hawkins and Smith 2013). It covers *resolution* of difficulties that the coach encounters in their practice and conformity to the standards and rules of the profession, especially compliance with codes of ethics.

In addition to these three functional areas it is possible to identify another one that is often recognised as an essential element of supervisory work:

Reflective Dialogue and In-depth Reflection: This is indicated in the recent surveys about supervision (MacAnally et al, 2019; Moral et al., 2018). It also appears in the 2019 EMCC Supervision Competence Framework under the heading of the competence 'Facilitates Development' (see EMCC Supervision Guidelines).

To give this function a more legitimate status, Moral & Angel (2019) propose splitting the *Normative/Qualitative* function into two functions: *resolution* and *elevation*. If the first implies analysis and solving problems encountered during coaching practice, the second is about co-reflecting on deeper influences in coaching practice. It could be said that the first function is quite practical and covers technical difficulties and compliance to standards and codes of ethics. It aims at quality and professionalism. The second function of 'elevation' relies on in-depth reflection and discussion of meaning, values and vision. Such in-depth reflection is clearly appreciated by coaches in their supervision.

Evidently, as for definitions of coaching supervision, the conceptualisation of its main functions is a work in progress. It requires further conceptual work that connects these functions to wider theoretical psychological, sociological and educational propositions in order to map the important constructs and relationships between them. Further empirical studies could then investigate the extent and validity of such a theoretical framework.

2. Theoretical developments demonstrated in the literature

In a young practice-based discipline, it is unsurprising that empirical and theoretical literature is heavily outweighed by practice-based and/or practitioner-oriented literature. This literature focuses on how respective authors believe the discipline is best practiced. In this section however we focus on the literature that reports or develops more formal theory, or, given the somewhat embryonic stage of development in this area, how the literature in effect implies

theoretical constructs. That said, the concept of theory is somewhat elastic, and some definition is required.

At one end of a horizontal continuum, we can think of strict predictive theory which describes the world in terms of exactly the conditions under which one event will follow another. Such a theory may also be more or less rich in explanation. It will stand until such time as contradictory evidence is demonstrated (cf Popper, 1959). It is a purely logical test that they are either current, or they have been falsified. Such theories are (probably) unattainable in a complex social context. Along the continuum, we may find the range of psychological theories which describe the relationship of one event following another as being generally true rather than infallibly true. Here, the assessment is statistical rather than logical. Further along again, we may find shared, but generally untested, sets of beliefs about interactions and causality. These claims tend to be maintained through discourse and are near neighbours to theories-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1974) which can be thought of as habits of mind that may be supported by a practitioner's personal experience.

If theories describe the functioning of the world, models are an attempt to represent part of that functioning in a way that is meaningful. Classically, molecular theory is represented by models consisting of table tennis balls and connecting sticks. It helps us understand and extrapolate, but it is not as close to what we believe to be 'accurate' as formal theory. Models are intended to be more useful than accurate. Our practices may be more influenced by models than they are by theories as their metaphorical quality helps to make them more accessible and memorable. We can think of models as representing the whole continuum of different types of theory and as potentially collecting together understandings of different theories.

'Tools' and 'processes' reflect theories and/or models (in the broad sense outlined above) and represent their practical implementation. This may be a very intentional translation of a theoretical stance, or it may be that such theory has not been articulated in any more formal way than its incorporation into a tool or process. In brief, tools and processes are things practitioners do, models guide action, and theories attempt to describe the logic of the world in which these actions take place.

Finally, approaches (or in psychotherapy what is often labelled modalities) are collections of tools, models and theories that may articulate or, to a greater or lesser extent, reflect an underlying theoretical or philosophical outlook.

In this section, we take theories and more strongly theoretical models as our focal point. Doing so, in itself indicates the paucity of such theories.

Overview

Strongly theoretical work in the area of coaching supervision is piecemeal. Practices and practice models are presented which could be interpreted to reflect existing theories of change and human development. In some cases, these are explicitly articulated (e.g. Hay, 2007; Sandler, 2011; Congram, 2011; Cooke, 2011). These contributions are reviewed only briefly here as the essential nature of these theories is largely unchanged by their application to coaching supervision.

Theoretical frameworks are also implied in the conceptualisation of empirical studies. They are more likely to be articulated explicitly where such studies take a hypothetico-deductive approach. For example, Moral (2015) hypothesised that, "the ego defences of supervisors or candidates to become supervisors are more oriented towards mature defences than the general population and the population of coaches", thus implying a causal theoretical framework. However, the bulk of quantitative studies to date have been descriptive; they have addressed uptake of supervision, frequency, feelings about being supervised and potential outcomes (some of these are discussed in the subsequent sections of this paper). A

number of qualitative studies take an exploratory approach in which *a priori* speculation about specific relationships between constructs does not play a part. Consequently, although a number of them raise interesting and useful observations, which may themselves constitute interesting elements of a theoretical framework, theorising tends to be very localised to the phenomenon under study. Sheppard's (2017) study for example implies that a wider theory of supervision should include attitudinal aspects of the supervisee which facilitate change through the supervision process. These attitudinal variables are not, however, positioned within an existing or new theoretical framework. An exception to the expectation that there is no *a priori* theorising in the qualitative literature is the use of Conceptual Encounter as this methodology presupposes a starting conceptual model which is then refined through the process of consultation with participants with recognised expertise (see Bachkirova, Rose & Noon, *in press*). Although there is a growing strand of coaching research using Conceptual Encounter (for example, Noon, 2018) some of which have direct relevance to practitioner development and therefore the supervisor's work (for example, Bachkirova, 2015), we found none that explored supervision theory explicitly.

As discussed in the previous section, there are also theoretical claims implicit in definitions of coaching supervision. For example, Hawkins et al (2019, p5) state that supervision, "provides a disciplined space in which the supervisee can reflect on particular work and client situations and relationships, and on the reactivity and patterns they evoke in the mind." It is implicit in this statement that the absence of disciplined space or the process of reflection would undermine the achievement of the supervision aim. The theoretical content in these examples is incidental to the discussion from which they are drawn and they are therefore discussed as an aspect of the substantive contribution to other sections of this review (clarifying the concept of supervision, the value of coaching supervision, the use of supervision).

Finally, there are attempts to theorise the process of coaching supervision and how it achieves its outcomes. These are rare, indeed Gray (2017) contends that, because of the diversity of practices and contexts, "as yet ... there is no specific theoretical model for effective coaching supervision".

Theoretical perspectives from psychotherapy and other disciplines

Congram (2011) identifies "three main components of Gestalt in the context of coaching supervision". These consist of, "*dialogic process, phenomenological method* and attending to the *holistic field*" (p. 122). Congram's chapter expands on these components and explores the impact of practices emerging from them. The underlying *theory* of Gestalt is not analysed specifically in relation to the aims of coaching supervision.

In the same collection, Cooke (2011) does outline the fundamental theoretical elements of Carl Rogers' person-centred approach: the actualizing tendency, the distress caused by the development of an inauthentic self-concept and the methods that facilitate therapeutic change. Cooke highlights the alignment of these principles with the developmental and resourcing functions of supervision (using Hawkins & Smith's, 2006, categories). However, the qualitative function is problematic from a person-centred stance as it lays responsibility and power at the feet of the supervisor (p135). In common with problems reported elsewhere in applying psychotherapeutic theory to coaching, Cooke notes that the supervisee does not necessarily need to be experiencing incongruence in their self-concept to benefit from reflection in supervision.

As a theory of interaction, transactional analysis can be most clearly used as an orientation to the developmental function (Hay, 2011, here using Proctor's categories). The relevance of transactional analysis for coaches is spelled out by Hay (2007) with particular

attention given to ego states, games, strokes and the underpinning role of transference. Levin's theory of child development is also adapted by Hay to the supervision interaction. The theory is illustrated in relation to supervision scenarios.

Sandler (2011) explains and illustrates how psychodynamic concepts can be seen to emerge in supervision. Reflecting the history of psychotherapy, at least some of these concepts are present to a greater or lesser extent in the background theory of most if not all psychotherapeutically informed approaches to coaching supervision. Transference (and countertransference), parallel process and defences are given particular attention. Crowe et al (2011) further examine the potential for parallel processes occurring in coaching mental health workers as a contributor to coaching for mental health workers, especially where the intention of coaching is transformational. Although Crowe et al attend only to supervision explicitly insofar as they take clinical supervision as the model on which the use of parallel process in coaching can be based, their description of coaching for mental health work overlaps considerably with definitions and conceptualisations of coaching supervision, particularly the developmental/formative function. Hardin & Gehlert (2019) hypothesise that the use of self is beneficial in coaching (on the basis of existing findings in the coaching field) and (on the basis of experiences in psychotherapy) that it can be developed in supervision through the process of developing reflexivity and role modelling of the supervisor.

Relational dynamics specific to coaching supervision

Cohen (2015) has demonstrated that feelings of shame may prevent coaches from bringing relevant material to supervision. However, de Haan (2017) speculates that voluntarism may underpin greater levels of trust in coaching supervision than in supervision of comparable helping professions. Generally, de Haan (2017) found that women, older and more experienced coaches and those that took more supervision were more satisfied with the relationship and outcomes of their supervision. Levels of trust were lower with group supervision. These findings support de Haan's (2012, p6) characterisation of supervision as "the regular provision of a safe and confidential space where the coach or consultant is helped to reflect on his professional practice". De Haan's emphasis on the relational aspects are founded on "everything that is known about the effectiveness of helping relationships, working alliances and parallel processes" (p10) and is therefore very much in line with psychodynamic theory.

McAnally et al's (2019) global survey asked participants what was 'most helpful' in their supervisors' behaviours, suggesting therefore some potential for a predictive effect. These were: listening well; asking powerful questions; creating the opportunity to reflect on coaching practice; gaining specific techniques and tools; making specific improvement suggestions; recognising own current strengths and gaining confidence.

Estevan-Ubeda (2017) suggests that power plays an important role in the coach supervision relationship and warrants closer attention by supervisors and as part of their development.

Groups and supervision

While there is a long tradition of theorisation about groups, group dynamics and group therapy interventions in other disciplines, theorisation in coaching supervision is scant.

Throughout general texts, reviews and surveys, group supervision is mentioned as an alternative format. In a study of a single supervision group, Butwell (2006) found that some participants were wary of self-disclosure, though there were reported benefits to sharing experience and problems. Lucas & Whitaker (2014) exploring their own practice conceptualised co-facilitated groupwork occurring at three levels simultaneously: managing the task; managing the tensions in the relationship between facilitators; and the sense of an emergent partnership with the group that results from the two other layers working well. In a grounded theory study of peer group supervision, Homer (2017) identified strengths in the

social aspects of the group, particularly the impact of taking multiple positions in the group: supervisor, supervisor and observer (similar responses were found by Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009).

In a largely practice-oriented chapter, Hawkins & Smith (2013) review group supervision processes and methods. They note that groups may be convenient, cost and time effective, though there may be challenges of group dynamics. They pay particular attention to the group climate and a sensitivity to group 'games' (the occurrence of which is evidenced in Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009, p155). They also comment (p208) that, "in group supervision it feels as though we have opened up the internal minds and have created an external representation of the different views."

While the responsibility of the group supervisor to hold responsibility for group process is widely acknowledged (eg Pinder, 2011; Hawkins & Smith, 2013), Moral & Lamy (2016) suggest a relationship between the effectiveness of group supervision to elements of collective intelligence, such as the distribution of turn taking and social sensitivity (Woolley et al, 2010). This concept may connect more easily with Turner et al's (2017) proposition to use critical action learning as the primary model for group supervision in place of psychotherapeutic models.

Frameworks and meta-models

Tkatch & Di Girolamo (2017) report on "meta-models describe the interactions between the different elements within a supervisory relationship". Such models offer an interpretive perspective rather than predictive theory.

Hawkins (2011) describes his own previous work on supervision (and therefore including the 7-eyed model) as reflecting 'four pillars': informed by a systemic perspective; in service of all parts of the system learning and developing; attending to the client in relation to their systemic context; including the coach and the supervisor as part of the field that is being reflected upon (p167). Hawkins cites Capra's (1996) definition of systems as "an integrated whole whose essential properties arise from relationships between its parts". Elsewhere, Hawkins & Schwenk (2011, p28) note that the central 7-eyed model of their approach, "points out the way in which the systemic context of the coachee can be mirrored in the supervisory relationship" and that it "integrates insights and aspects of intersubjective psychotherapy ... focusing on the interrelationship between the internal and relational life of individuals." Hawkins & Smith (2013) extend these conceptual positions into specific practices and methods for supervision. The 7-eyed model is characterised theoretically by the occurrence and re-occurrence of parallel process in all the explicit and implicit relationships making up the supervisor/coach/client network.

Reflecting on the outcomes of a grounded theory study based on interviews with three supervisors and three supervisees, Passmore and McGoldrick (2009) conceptualise the social process of supervision in three stages: context (needs and expectations of the coach); process (behaviours and experience) and outcomes (in terms of learning and change). Gray (2017) builds on this central core, recognising its systemic implications, adding the organizational needs, benefits and expectations. Carroll (2006) argues that, compared to counselling, the client organisation becomes a significant stakeholder in executive coaching and its supervision. He therefore suggests consideration of the relationship between the client organisation and the coaching organisation in assessing the complete field of the coaching intervention.

Models of coach development and supervisor development

Hawkins & Smith (2013) cite Stoltenburg & Delworth's stage model of practitioner development and apply it to supervisor attitudes and behaviours. Hence,

The supervisor of Level 2 trainees needs to be less structured and didactic than with Level 1 trainees, but a good deal of emotional support is necessary as the trainees may

oscillate between excitement and depressive feelings of not being able to cope, or perhaps even of being in the wrong job (Hawkins & Smith, 2013, p.180).

Hawkins & Smith argue that the model can guide the supervisor to appropriate interventions in relation to the supervisee's current stage, and in relation to their forward development (assuming that the model describes a desirable progression). Again, following Stoltenburg & Delworth, they argue that supervisors need to be at a higher level of development in their own practice and that they experience a separate but parallel development in their supervision practice.

Cavanagh et al (2016) similarly argue that the functions ('key processes') of supervision permutate with the different needs of the supervisee relative to their stage of practice development (novice, practitioner, expert). The key processes are developing capabilities, enhancing quality performance, and exploring paradigms. A third dimension is added to reflect the possibility of looking at the system at three levels (individual, interpersonal, systemic). The resulting 3x3x3 cuboid space suggests 9 activities with layers of deepening focus.

Further theoretical development in coaching supervision

This review of the current state of theorisation suggests a number of areas where further work would be of benefit to the discipline.

With respect to the application of the logic of psychotherapeutic modalities to coaching supervision, we may note that:

- Different modalities have certain features in common and these features (such as the function of positive regard, empathy, transference, 'games') may have come to be understood as fundamental in coaching supervision on the basis of history and experiential rather than empirical evidence;
- the distinct features of different modalities may align to different parts (functions, roles) of the supervision process;
- it seems that the adherence to a psychotherapeutic modality could be used to justify *per se* a supervisory approach.

It would be useful, therefore, to establish through future research, the mapping of different strategies to the different needs of supervisees and the desired outcomes of supervision. At the current stage of development, this would suggest exploratory qualitative research.

There seems to be a consensus amongst coaches responding to surveys of some specific relational antecedents of effective supervision. More overt work on developing and testing more generalizable frameworks would be valuable, both for practitioners and for the training and education of supervisors.

Similarly, in the area of group supervision, practice seems to have followed some principles from theory outside of coaching supervision which may not have been explicitly operationalized or fully articulated in the translation to the coaching supervision domain. It would seem that the concept of collective intelligence may provide useful insights into group work. Systems theories are also articulated at a very coarse level in application to coaching supervision (Lawrence, 2019) and a more extensive translation to the domain would be warranted. Also implicit in this development would be more explicit and extensive incorporation of complexity theories. We are aware from professional and academic networks that some further work may be in progress in these areas.

The development of the coaching practitioner is a significant outcome of coaching supervision and is currently specified largely by competency frameworks (which are typically not evidence-based) and practice-based models. A more robust concept of professional development would require more explicit definition of the nature and outcome of supervision. The education field is then well developed in the area of adult and learning development.

Taking these points together, we conclude both that specific theoretical work could be given more emphasis, but also that empirical work across the range of research themes could pay more attention to the theoretical landscape and its development.

3. The value of coaching supervision

Many authors have attributed benefits to coaching supervision in books, reports and other grey literature (e.g. Hawkins & Schwenk, 2006; Hawkins, Turner & Passmore, 2019). These benefits vary from those that are reasonably simple, localised, or operational like “working through a client challenge” or “learn[ing] from my supervisor’s experience” (McAnnaly et al, 2019, p12), to quite substantial benefits such as “enabling organisations to monitor coaching, develop coaching capabilities and increase coaching’s organisational impact” (Hawkins & Schwenk, 2006 p18). This range of benefits may be explained by the general lack of empirical evidence about the value of coaching supervision. However, a number of peer-reviewed publications (13) have formed a theme that provides substance to the debates about the value of coaching supervision. The theme is formed by empirical papers in peer-refereed journals describing projects based on theoretically grounded empirical enquiry and include explicit conceptual analysis of data.

It is important to note that this construct has been named as the ‘value’ of supervision rather than ‘effectiveness’ or ‘impact’ at this stage of available evidence. There are various reasons for this, but it is primarily because the conceptualisation of effectiveness of supervision is still a work in progress. Furthermore, the majority of papers addressing these topics directly are based on qualitative studies (8). Five papers use approaches that quantify data in their methodology. One of these describes a randomised control trial design (Graßmann and Schermuly, 2018) which hypothesised the value of supervision as a mitigating factor for negative effects of coaching. Four other quantitative research publications are surveys.

All of these studies describe the value of supervision from the perspective of coaches rather than other stakeholders. This is apparently in contrast to the views of coaching supervision advocates. Carroll summarised in an unpublished paper (2008) the views of a group of well-known thinkers and authors in the coaching field on the benefits that a number of stakeholders of coaching may gather from supervision. These stakeholders fall into 5 groups:

1. the coach (the supervisee)
2. the client/coachee (the individuals receiving coaching)
3. the coaching organisation (which sells coaching provision and employs coaches)
4. the organisation (whose individuals are receiving coaching and who pay for it, ROI)
5. the Coaching Profession (professional bodies to which coaches belong, ongoing training, developing standards, ethical practice etc)
6. the wider system (quality of coaching, quality control issues, use of talent and potential)

The discrepancy between this list and reviewed studies suggests the need for research that considers multiple stakeholder perspectives in evaluating the value of supervision. It is recognised, at the same time, that the complexity that researchers face in implementing such a design in the real-life context is extremely challenging.

Experimental design studies

As Graßmann and Schermuly’s (2018) research is the only RCT design (in this case - a randomised control field experiment) amongst existing publications, it is worth describing in more detail. Graßmann and Schermuly (2018) with other colleagues conducted a series of studies on the negative effect of coaching. In this study novice coaches - students of a

university in Germany – experienced some negative effects of coaching, even when coaching was seen as successful by their ‘clients’ – other students. The examples of negative effect for coaches included, for example, ‘feeling too much responsibility for a client’ or ‘feeling emotionally exhausted’. These effects were stronger in coaches with high levels of neuroticism and even stronger if these coaches belonged to a ‘control group’ - without supervision provided (Graßmann and Schermuly, 2018). This may indicate a preventative/mitigating function of coaching supervision for novice coaches and the authors connect this with the restorative/resourcing function of supervision and vulnerability of particular type of coaches (Proctor, 1987; Hawkins & Smith, 2006). At the same time, the authors present their conclusion in only tentative terms, considering the limitations of the study. They do not suggest supervision as a panacea for negative effects because the use of supervision did not completely prevent negative effects for coaches and clients in the first place (Graßmann and Schermuly, 2018). It can be said, however, that this is an initial and tentative evidence of the benefit from the restorative function of supervision.

Surveys

Findings from the peer-refereed surveys on the value of supervision (de Haan, 2017; Grant, 2012; Jepson, 2016; Müller, Kotte & Möller, 2020) suggest a number of other benefits as perceived by coaches in relation to their practice. Two of these studies that aimed at a wider spectrum of potential benefits, indicate a particular emphasis on the developmental function of supervision (Jepson, 2016; Grant, 2012), for example, “the development of insights and new perspectives” (Grant, 2012, p21) or explicitly, to “Ensure continual growth and development of my practice” (Jepson, 2016, p137). Both of these studies also indicate a value associated with the normative function, for example “helping maintain the delivery of a good quality coaching particularly in dealing with difficult cases” (Grant, 2012, p21).

Two other surveys (de Haan, 2017; Müller, Kotte & Möller, 2020) indicate more nuanced findings about the value of supervision. For example, de Haan (2017) concludes that coach supervisees are significantly 'safer, more satisfied and more trusting' in comparison to existing data on users of supervision in counselling and psychotherapy. Differences in age and experience of participating coaches suggests that older and more experienced coaches, and those who took more supervision, have higher levels of trust and safety. A recent study by Müller, Kotte & Möller (2020) found that coaches have higher satisfaction with their job and leisure time and less work-related mental strain (compared to German population norm scores). It is notable that coaching supervision had a significant buffer effect on coaches' job satisfaction when they experienced a high amount of work-related mental strain.

Qualitative studies

The quality of papers describing research conducted within the interpretative paradigm and using qualitative methodologies, varied in terms of demonstrated rigour. Two of them did not indicate an applied methodological approach at all (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Butwell, 2006). Six other used a Grounded Theory approach (Lawrence & White, 2014; Homer, 2017; Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009), Action Research (Hodge, 2016), IPA (McGivern, 2009) or ethnography (Robson, 2016).

Considering the small number of these studies and the fact that identifying the value of supervision was not their main focus, in this analysis we summarise their findings on this topic without differentiation by contexts, for example, qualified supervisor-led or peer-supervision. Such an overarching perspective on the findings shows that the value of supervision is in the reflective space provided (e.g. Armstrong & Geddes, 2009) to present and explore cases (e.g. Butwell, 2006) with an opportunity to be challenged and to validate one’s practice (e.g. Lawrence & White, 2014). The value was also being seen in promoting continuing learning (e.g. McGivern, 2009) and development of reflexivity (e.g. Hodge, 2016).

It could be added though that when group supervision was the focus of the study, additional benefits were identified such as learning in many roles (e.g. Homer, 2017) and being part of the community that enables learning and support (e.g. Robson, 2016).

The analysis of this construct strongly suggests the need for further empirical data on the value of coaching supervision. It could be said that the progress in this regard is impeded by the lack of theories and conceptual work that could generate further hypotheses for quantitative studies. Without them the field relies on surveys rather than more sophisticated designs. It is also possible to speculate that qualitative studies are too slow so far to produce in-depth observations and propositions that would be useful to explore in larger studies.

4. The use of supervision

Even though the “scope of research on coaching supervision is still rather limited” (Tkach and DiGirolamo 2017), recognition of supervision’s importance and its increasing uptake have been consistently identified across the coaching field (Moral and Lamy 2018; de Haan 2017; Hawkins and Turner 2017; McAnally 2019). At the same time, doubts about the validity of this interpretation of growth have been also voiced (Robson 2016). It is possible that some of the studies/reports may be over-reporting due to the fact that participating coaches might often be members of professional bodies who are invested in promoting supervision and its desirability in practice and professional development (Hawkins et al 2019). Considering these caveats, the existing state of the use of coaching supervision warrants investigation.

As noted, the literature on coaching supervision suggests that its use in coaching is justified and that there are specific features of this use that deserve attention. To explore these features, we take a closer look at what approaches to supervision are widely accepted including national differences in the concept and use of coaching supervision; the degree of uptake and frequency amongst practitioners; possible variations of the modalities of supervision with potential issues in their use.

A few studies have tried to compare the level of development of coaching supervision worldwide (Moral and Lamy, 2018; McAnally et al, 2019). They suggest the existence of a predominant approach accepted nearly everywhere, which is basically characterized by its qualitative, developmental, and resourcing functions (Hawkins et al, 2019), and typically propagates the seven-eyed-model (Kotte 2017). Moral and Lamy (2018) have called this approach the “modèle Britannique”. Trying to look at the big picture, however, considerable national differences seem to emerge. Despite wide acceptance of the modèle Britannique, there still exist some differing views on the precise definitions of coaching versus supervision (Moral and Lamy, 2018), and consequently, on coaching supervision itself (Kotte 2017; Schreyögg, 2011). In addition, Carrol (2006) claims that existing models of supervision are only in part sufficient for the demands of coaching supervision.

While there is a diverse field of publications on coaching supervision in English (Moral and Lamy 2018), the literature in French is focused on a much smaller number of contributors (Moral and Lamy 2015; 2018). In Germany, in contrast, supervision traditionally did not discriminate between the helping professions (Kotte 2017; Schreyögg 2011), even though the supervision of coaches has a long tradition in the German-speaking countries. As early as 1998 Petzold advocated the supervision of coaches as “meta-consulting” (Schreyögg 2011), and as central element of coach-training (Hassler 2011; Freitag-Becker et al 2017) coaching supervision has long been having a strong importance for the German certifying bodies (Kotte 2017). Despite its general presence, coaching supervision as a term in itself has been emerging only very recently in Germany (Kotte 2017).

In terms of the uptake of coaching supervision by coaches, different surveys indicate between approximately 50-80% of coaches reporting their use of coaching supervision (Salter,

2008; Jepson, 2016; Grant, 2012; Hawkins et al, 2019). These figures, however, have to be seen with a degree of caution as what they actually mean varies considerably. Very few studies, for example, explore the views of coaches who do not use supervision with an indication of their reasons, as has been done in an early study by Salter (2008). Many surveys do not attempt to make a differentiation in the usage of supervision between regular users and those who use coaching supervision only during their formal training. In terms of the frequency of usage, while the vast majority of coaches seems to be more or less in agreement on it being somewhere between a fortnight and bi-monthly (Grant, 2012), this decision is reported to often be adjusted “as needed” (Grant, 2012).

Surveys on the use of coaching supervision do not often differentiate the use of different modalities, such as one-to-one or group or peer-supervision. Those which do make this differentiation clear, however, indicate a growing popularity of peer-supervision with coaches reporting it as satisfactory, available and cheap (e.g. Robson 2016). Some of them indicate that this modality is preferred by many coaches over both formalized and informal supervision arrangements (Grant, 2012). Others attribute the popularity of peer supervision to the difficulty of finding a suitable supervisor, possibly due to lack of trust (de Haan, 2017), and the cost of supervision (Grant, 2012). In one survey over a third of a sample of coaches participating thought that supervision should be free (Hawkins et al, 2019). Others expressed the hope that institutions will offer more opportunity for coaching supervision (de Haan, 2017). The discussions of making coaching supervision mandatory continue with a predominant view that this could be counterproductive (de Haan, 2017; Salter, 2008).

Some literature describing the use of supervision reports not only potential benefits but also potential issues. The benefits of coaching supervision in the one-to-one modality, generally in line with the modèle Brittanique, are well and widely accepted (Jepson, 2016). In contrast, there is some debate about the benefits of supervision in the group-setting. On the one hand, there are reports by internal coaches that group supervision supports the development of a “community of practice” (Robson, 2016) and benefits from the unique group-setting. Other coaches see benefits of both modalities as more or less comparable (de Haan, 2017). However, participants in Grant’s (2012) study reported supervision in a group as challenging. In spite of such concerns, de Haan and Birch (2010) conclude that existing drawbacks may well be outweighed by the potential benefits of coaching supervision in groups.

In addition to challenging experiences reported by coaches, the literature indicates that coaching supervisors also wrestle with various challenges. Some of these challenges are highly characteristic when considered in the light of the three functions of coaching supervision. They include questions of how to choose appropriate approaches and processes during supervision (Moral & Lamy, 2016), how to skilfully work with dilemmas (Moral & Lamy, 2017), how to work with low levels of trust (Hawkins et al, 2019) and with self-deception of coaches (Bachkirova, 2015).

Conclusion

In this paper we set out to support and stimulate further development of knowledge on coaching supervision by working on two goals. First, to examine critically and explicate themes/constructs emerging from publications on coaching supervision and second, to identify concepts, questions and research methodologies that are important for the development of knowledge on coaching supervision. Our SLR identified 68 studies that matched our inclusion criteria with an overarching aim to be as inclusive as possible at this early stage of development of coaching supervision discipline. Our review focused on four themes or constructs that emerged in the process of rigorous analysis. It is important to say

that considering a comparatively limited number of approved sources, these themes are inter-related and in some of sub-themes draw from the same publications.

Across all four themes many authors indicated a clear lack of empirical studies (Kotte 2017; Möller 2016; Tkach & DiGirolamo 2017; Robson 2016). Others identify the current status quo of coaching supervision research as mostly sketchy (Moral & Lamy 2018; Tkach and DiGirolamo 2017), unevenly distributed (Moral & Lamy 2018; Kotte 2017), and insufficiently integrated with each other (Möller 2016). Overall, there is an agreement on the need for more research on coaching supervision. To guide this future research, we have formulated a series of directions for scholars grouped within four themes of our review. Based on the knowledge gap identified in our analysis we have also suggested particular research methodologies currently utilised in coaching research. In Table 1 we summarise our recommendations for further research.

Table 1. Summary of potential research questions and suggested research methodologies

Research question	Research methodology
<i>Clarifying the concept of coaching supervision</i>	
What are essential elements of supervision process that can allow defining this practice on basis of empirical investigation?	Q sort methodology
How the functions of coaching supervision are connected to wider theoretical psychological sociological and educational perspectives?	Conceptual investigation and mapping
How supervisors adjust their style when working with diverse groups of coaches?	Qualitative study
<i>The state of theoretical development demonstrated in the literature</i>	
How do supervisors conceptualize what they do?	Qualitative study
What is the relationship between different functions/process elements of supervision?	Qualitative study
What are the characteristics of bonding in coaching supervision?	Qualitative study
<i>The value attributed to supervision</i>	
What process elements of coaching supervision are associated with higher value of coaching supervision for coaches and other stakeholders?	Experimental design
What is the comparative value of receiving supervision in different modalities?	Qualitative study
What is the relative influence of receiving coaching supervision on the long-term development of the coach?	Diary study
What effect does supervision have on the development of emotional	Qualitative

patterns and attitudes of coaches both professionally and personally?	study
<i>The nature of the current use of the supervision in the field</i>	
What models/instruments of supervision are considered as useful by the supervisors and what do they see as missing for the quality of their practice?	Qualitative study
In what way the differences in delivery of coaching supervision in different cultural contexts are manifested?	Qualitative study/survey
What are the reasons for not undertaking coaching supervision?	Qualitative study/survey
What are the challenges that coaching supervisors face?	Qualitative study/survey

The suggestions for possible directions in this table imply a wide spectrum of future research paths. It is important to acknowledge however that although there is a desire for more, and especially larger quantitative studies, the scale of resource-investment required for such studies is often prohibitive (Tkach & DiGirolamo, 2017). We also believe that investments on such a scale should follow, and build on a body of elaborate qualitative research that is also limited at this stage. Such research can generate hypotheses for further investigation at a larger scale. Therefore, we support qualitative approaches that are currently applied by researchers as well as quantitative. With the number of studies growing we would advocate integration and creative synthesis of such studies, thus enhancing our in depth understanding of supervision practice. Mixed method studies would also be a methodology of choice for coaching supervision, but it is recognised that such studies may be hindered by the same organisational difficulties as large quantitative projects.

Although supervision of coaches differs from supervision in other helping professions, for research purposes this field may benefit from an understanding of and borrowing from approaches and research ideas that were generated in disciplines such as psychotherapy, training evaluation, and professional development. We particularly advocate more attention to the contexts of studies and diversity of coaches as researchers may have treated coaches as more homogenous a group than they actually are, potentially blurring important differentiations (Grant, 2012). Further down the line, it would be important to take into account the interests of other stakeholders in coaching supervision, in addition to coaches.

We acknowledge that our inclusion criteria were quite generous and other systematic reviews may decide to be stricter in terms of the quality of publications. However, we justify our decision because the intention of this review, as the first of this nature, was to stimulate the field at the state when research is scarce. We also note that we have produced a small number of quite broad themes, and further reviews may follow a different approach. In this study, however, the broad scope of these themes reflects the state of the discipline. Although this also limited the range of theories and research to which the findings could be applied, we have nevertheless confirmed a general pattern in the development of what is a very new discipline. We are confident that this review fulfilled its purpose to stimulate further research and conceptual work on coaching supervision with the use of the proposed research questions and methodological recommendations.

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