THE STATE OF COACHING SUPERVISION RESEARCH

2019
UPDATE

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INTRODUCTION

This report provides an update on the state of research on supervision in the helping professions (i.e., coaching and psychotherapy supervision) published in 2019. A survey of the literature indicates that the helping professions continue to establish a convincing evidence base for practice. Topics include the roles and responsibilities of supervisors, the supervisory relationship, models and methods of supervision, becoming a multiculturally competent supervisor, ethical and legal issues in supervision, education and training, and evaluation in supervision. Debate on the function, benefit, and efficacy of supervision continues. Through increasing research and interest, supervision continues to develop as an important training tool for helping professionals.

Some are taking a critical look at supervision by exploring both the positive and negative experiences of supervisors and supervisees (Forshaw et al., 2019; Schermuly, & Graßmann, 2019) and, albeit harder to measure, the link between supervision and the supervisee's clients (McComb et al., 2019; Stone et al., 2019). These investigations help the field to course correct by identifying solutions to potential issues that can arise in supervision. For example, based on case study research, Vandette and Shesko (2019) suggest that both supervisor and supervisee play a role in contributing to the overall positive experience of the supervisory relationship, an important factor in supervision outcomes (Enlow et al., 2019; Ladany et al., 2013; Watkins, 2014).

Although qualitative research in supervision is increasing, the disciplines continue to valorize *empirically robust evidence* as defined by a positivist paradigm which tends to use quantitative methods. This means that many reviews exclude qualitative design studies or studies that do not meet a certain rigor. While case examples cannot be used to generalize findings to a population, the data can be used to describe the experience from the supervisor's or supervisee's perspective helping the field to better understand the practice and providing scholars with conceptualizations to empirically test. This survey of the literature is a narrative, meaning, what follows is a summary and synthesis of what has been written on the topic but does not seek generalization or cumulative knowledge. This approach includes studies using positivist and constructivist paradigms and quantitative and qualitative methods. The purpose of this update is to provide a brief, high-level background for understanding current knowledge and highlighting the significance of new research.

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COACHING SUPERVISION

With the maturing of coaching as a profession, the field is promoting professional development among coaches. This is in line with the shift in the helping professions that emphasizes the importance of the reflective practitioner along with the scientist-practitioner (Scaife, 2019). Books on professional development in the field of coaching published in 2019 include:

- Dean, K., & Humphrey, S. (2019). *Coaching Stories: Flowing and Falling of Being a Coach*. Routledge.

- de Haan, E. (2019). *Critical Moments in Executive Coaching: Understanding the Coaching Process Through Research and Evidence-based Theory*. Routledge.

- Louis, D., & Diochon, P. F. (2019). *Complex Situations in Coaching: A Critical Case-Based Approach*. Routledge.

- van Nieuwerburgh, C., & Love, D. (2019). *Advanced Coaching Practice: Inspiring Change in Others*. SAGE Publications Limited.

Within these professional development books, coaching supervision is one of the activities that continues to draw attention as part of a coach's repertoire for developing and maintaining their practice. Supervision can be viewed as one type of professional development activity for helping professionals. Specifically, supervision can support a robust reflective practice. This is in line with empirical research on the coaching journey for staying fit for purpose. Findings from a range of coaching journeys indicate that supervision is one way that coaches maintain their skills. Supervision offers coaches an opportunity to reflect on their practice, developing themselves in order to be in service to their client(s) (Hullinger et al., 2020).

The most significant and comprehensive work on coaching supervision in 2019 was published by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC): *Coaching Supervision: Advancing Practice, Changing Landscapes* (Birch & Welch, 2019). The publication preceded EMCC's updated Supervision Competencies model announcement in July 2019 (EMCC, 2019). Interestingly, EMCC's updated model did not add or subtract any substantive content from its previous model. However, these two developments will surely contribute to the increasing interest and debate on coaching supervision. The mostly case study research conducted to date provides a foundation for testing conceptualizations and models. This offers an opportunity for ICF to leverage its research rigor when communicating the significance of coaching supervision.

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The coaching field continues to value supervision as an important factor in both personal and professional development that ultimately serves clients (Hawkins et al., 2019). Some reference the growing interest in supervision as an indicator for the professionalization of coaching (Müller et al., 2019). Despite these value propositions, there continues to be a lack of development of coaching supervision, i.e. practice has not caught up with advocacy (Hawkins et al., 2019).

Although not published in a peer-reviewed journal, Hodge (2019) writes about her action research inquiry into supervision on location; i.e., getting out into nature. The piece explores, experiments, reflects, and shares in vulnerability. Combining creative writing with descriptive analysis, the piece includes photos and embeds YouTube clips of Hodge's short reflections on her experiences of supervision on location. Hodge (2019) offers more questions than answers, demonstrating the coaching mindset for curiosity. This is an example of the type of research that is being done in the field but would not be counted in a traditional literature review because it lacks empirical rigor according to the positivist paradigm. However, Hodge's action research contributes to the field by exploring, describing, and analyzing coaching supervision and offers conceptualizations to be tested in future research.

PSYCHOTHERAPY SUPERVISION

Key themes emerging from research on supervision in the field of psychotherapy include supervision can benefit supervisees, expertise grows developmentally, multiculturalism impacts supervision, the supervisory relationship is extremely important, feedback is an important factor, and supervision may impact client outcomes (Callahan et al., 2019). The field acknowledges that research on supervision lags behind psychotherapy research and has not established sufficient empirical evidence. Instead, the research draws preliminary, tentative conclusions on the benefits of supervision as a training and professional maintenance intervention.

In terms of theory, the generic model of psychotherapy supervision (Watkins, 2018; Watkins & Callahan, 2019) continues to be used to conceptualize the practice of supervision in terms of intersecting input, process, and output variables. The intersecting process variables include supervision contract, supervision operations, supervision bond, supervisee and supervisor self-relatedness, in-session impacts, and temporal patterns (Callahan et al., 2019). This generic model is intended to serve as a framework for organizing supervision research.

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influence supervisee nondisclosure (Gibson et al., 2019) along with supervisee development and outcomes (Port, 2019; Vandette & Shesko, 2019). Other research investigated factors that influence the relationship, including positive regard (Carl & Bailen, 2019), self-compassion (Coastan, 2019), and supervisor humility (Watkins et al., 2019).

One theme that stands out in the clinical supervision research is the focus on diversity. This line of research looks at the role identity plays in the supervisory relationship (Hooley, 2019); multicultural approaches in supervision (Patallo, 2019); challenges in the multicultural supervision process (Qi et al., 2019); ethical challenges in transnational settings (Schultz et al., 2019); experiences of supervision of students of color (Jendrusina & Martinez, 2019); and lack of resources and guidelines for multicultural supervision (Cohen et al., 2019).

In psychotherapy, supervisors must handle multiple responsibilities, including teaching new skills and techniques to supervisees, setting standards for competence in the profession, and ensuring supervisee and client welfare. Specifically, supervisors attend to clients' safety, supervisees' adherence to ethics, relational ruptures, and multicultural microaggressions (Tangen et al., 2019). As such, some research explored supervisor training and education:

- Tangen et al. (2019) cite the field for lacking pedagogical practice in supervision, therefore, they turn to learning theories to propose a supervision guide for novice supervisors.

- Mackay et al. (2019) conduct a literature review and include a participatory phase of supervisor perspectives to investigate effective learning and teaching strategies for clinical supervisor education. Based on the review and the participants' perspectives, Mackay and colleagues suggest that the field is lacking a person-centered learning culture in supervisor education.

- In a descriptive analysis of recorded interactions between supervisor and supervisee dyads, Novoa-Gómez et al. (2019) calculate the time spent in different behavior classes of the supervision process. Findings indicate that the most time was spent on assessment, intervention, and conceptualization skills. Behavior classes in which less time was spent were related to emotional and interpersonal processes.

- Based on practitioner experience, Watkins et al. (2019) propose a Supervision Session Pyramid as a teaching tool on session flow to use in supervisor education.

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While research on supervision does not have as long of a history as psychotherapy, the field has been able to cover significant ground in debating, describing, analyzing, and assessing the practice of supervision.

- Through qualitative and quantitative analysis of two major empirical studies, Rønnestad et al. (2019) investigate the variations in professional development of supervisors. Drawing on phase and trajectory models, the scholars integrate the findings into a cyclical-sequential model for clinical training, supervision, and practice.

- Through collaborative enquiry, Davys et al. (2019) investigated the practice of supervision. The experienced supervisors (n = 4) critically reflected on audio-recordings of their supervision of practitioners. The group members created a "thinking aloud" process model for critique and feedback. Key themes included supervisor authenticity and presence, encouraging reflection, participation, and uncovering assumptions and the benefits of the thinking aloud process.

Of note, there was little research on the supervision of supervisors. In a letter to the editor, Welton et al. (2019) bring attention to the issue that psychotherapy supervisors traditionally have received little training in effective supervision. The scholars advocate for improving supervisor competence through supervisor training and supervision of supervisors.

Reviews of the literature continue to cite lack of research, i.e. empirically robust evidence. For example, Barrett et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review to better understand the role clinical supervision plays in the development of competence in psychology training. Their systematic approach limited the review to only one form of evidence, i.e. quantitative, and excluded qualitative design studies. Based on the findings, the authors conclude that preliminary evidence supports the use of supervisory methods and techniques to increase evidence-based practitioner fidelity among psychology trainees.

As another example, Kühne et al. (2019) systematically review the status of interventions and quality of the current empirical literature on clinical supervision and from 15 studies conclude that research in clinical supervision is lagging behind psychotherapy research. From a competency-based perspective, the authors recommend focus areas for future practice and research, including: define, review, and continuously develop supervisor competencies; include active methods, live feedback, and video-based supervision; enhance the deliberate commitment to ethical standards to protect clients; value and include scientific knowledge and progress; support profession-long learning of supervisees and supervisors (p. 10).

Despite these reviews that cite lack of research, some are starting to conclude that supervision has the potential to impact the quality of the services delivered to the client (Carl & Bailen, 2019). While research on supervision does not have as long of a history as

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In what is, by far, the most provocative piece in the literature surveyed, Scaife (2019) offers a critical perspective on the limitations of the scientific paradigm along with evidence-based practice and competency models that dictate what works for whom. Scaife provides a critical perspective on the dominant type of knowledge informing the field of psychology. She offers another lens for evidence-based practice that opens up to multiple types of knowledges. She calls for the field to broaden the definition of evidence to include those things that do not readily lend themselves to measurement. From a holistic perspective, Scaife defines evidence-based practice as one that integrates the best research evidence with practitioner expertise along with their assumptions, beliefs, and values and their clients' values. In this guide for clinical supervisors, Scaife explores frequently encountered dilemmas including:

- How can supervisors facilitate learning?

- What are the ethical bases of supervision?

- What helps to create and maintain an effective working alliance?

- How can supervisors balance management and supervision roles?

- How can supervisors work equitably in an increasingly diverse and pluralistic world?

CONCLUSION

The literature continues to suggest that despite the lack of and limitations in research studies, supervision is an important part of professional development in both training and continuing education for helping professionals. As the growing research and interest in supervision continues, the field of coaching can engage in conversations on competency models, regulation, and mandatory versus voluntary requirements for credentialing. These conversations should include different perspectives that can be explored through research, practice, and values.

Future research could explore which factors contribute to the development of positive supervisory relationships. For example, investigating supervisor-specific factors (e.g., training in supervision practices, personal experiences of supervision, and values) that may contribute to a supervisory practice and outcomes would be helpful. Research could be used in developing recommendations

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for best practices in supervision. Further, examination of supervisee-specific variables (e.g., personal experiences of supervision, openness to feedback, comfort with vulnerability, perception of supervisory relationship) could clarify supervisees' contributions to the supervisory relationship. This could support the development of concrete recommendations for supervisees' approaches to supervision and how they can positively influence supervisory relationships to support their own professional development.

In considering emerging trends, what role will artificial intelligence (AI) play in the practice of supervision? The field of sports coaching has started to investigate the use and efficacy of AI as a form of feedback provided to the athlete (i.e. trainee) that is intended to support the coach (i.e. supervisor) in their practice. (Cau et al., 2019). Moreover, research on multicultural issues in supervision reflects the changing social climate of an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. Culturally competent supervisors are those who can assist in the development of self-awareness, knowledge, and skills in order to provide interventions that understand and respect the supervisee's multiple diversity dimensions.

As a parting take away from this narrative survey of the literature, greater emphasis has been placed on quantitative metrics as evidence-based research in the literature. Anecdotal evidence, feedback, and stories tend to be overlooked in reviews.

ANNOTATIONS OF SELECT COACHING SUPERVISION REFERENCES

ARTICLES

Birch, J., & Welch, P. (Eds.). (2019). *Coaching Supervision: Advancing Practice, Changing Landscapes.* **London: Routledge.**

The editors compile practitioner examples, case studies, and applied research on coaching supervision from international academics and practitioners in the field. Applying a coach approach to the writing, the editors invite the reader into a space for dialogue and reflection. The practitioners and researchers share their experiences and practices along with their research to offer insights into the complex practice of coaching supervision. Steeped in dialogue, reflective practice, and systems and complexity thinking, topics include ethics, emotions, unconscious processes, self-identity, neurobehavior, cultural belief systems, internal coaching, executive coaching, supervision of supervision, and artificial intelligence. The case study research sprinkled throughout the book presents the field with the opportunity to test the models on supervision.

Lawrence, P. (2019). *Group supervision in organizations.* **Center for Coaching in Organizations.**

In this white paper, Lawrence reports on the potential benefits of supervision to organizations: capability building, systemic thinking, and culture shifting. Lawrence uses findings from his qualitative research study on group supervision in Australia to promote group supervision in organizations. He emphasizes the importance for including coach supervisor training in the learning plan of organizations that are considering bringing in coaching supervision to create a reflective learning space.

Lawrence, P. (2019). What happens in group supervision? Exploring current practice in Australia. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring,* **17(2), 138-157.**

Lawrence uses the 3P (philosophy, purpose, and practice) framework of supervision and coaching (Jackson & Bachkirova, 2019) to explore practices in group supervision in Australia. Specifically, Lawrence conducted qualitative interviews with supervisors (n = 7) and supervisees (n = 57) to investigate why people seek group supervision, what benefits they derive from the process, and how the process works. Supervisors and supervisees alike viewed supervision as a reflective space enabling learning. The majority of supervisees went to supervision in service of their own development. Resourcing and qualitative functions were important but not as important as developing themselves. Supervisees reported that the impact of group supervision enhanced their skills and knowledge, awareness, and confidence. The description of the supervisor's practice or role included contracting and facilitating, creating a learning environment, teaching, and being qualified (i.e. knowledgeable, experienced, and able to role model effective coaching). Supervisors and supervisees were not aligned when it came to a systemic coaching approach to supervision, i.e. the role of the wider context in the practice. Lawrence reflects on this discrepancy, posing to the coaching supervision community as a system: "Looking to the coaching supervision community as a system directs us to explore beyond the practice of group supervision itself...for those who advocate a

systemic perspective, how might we best take our own advice in seeking to understand the role and function of coaching supervision, and group supervision specifically, through a systemic lens?" (p. 153).

Müller, A. A., Kotte, S., & Möller, H. (2019). Coach and no regrets about it: On the life satisfaction, work-related mental strain, and use of supervision of workplace coaches. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, **13(1), 16-29.**

The authors investigate the life satisfaction and mental strain of workplace coaches by conducting an online questionnaire of coaches from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (n = 110). For the authors, life satisfaction could indirectly contribute to coaching effectiveness. The authors explore the role of reflective practice, i.e. coaching supervision, plays in life satisfaction and work-related mental strain of coaches. Participants reported positive impacts of coaching supervision. Findings indicate that supervision has a moderating effect, or buffer, on coaches' job satisfaction when work-related mental strain is high. The authors use (Bachkirova, 2008, pp. 16–17) definition of coaching supervision: "'a formal process of professional support, which ensures continuing development of the coach and effectiveness of his/her coaching practice'" (p. 6). The authors suggest that supervision plays an important role in a coach's self-care. Supervision as a successful strategy to manage mental strain. These findings point to the resourcing function of supervision. The authors recommend that "further research is needed regarding the use (e.g., frequency, occasions, functions) and long-term effects of coaching supervision in order to establish it as an evidence-based strategy of reflective practice that contributes to the professionalisation of coaching." (p. 11).

Schermuly, C. C., & Graßmann, C. (2019). A literature review on negative effects of coaching–what we know and what we need to know. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, **12(1), 39-66.**

Based on a literature review of nine diverse studies, the authors investigated the negative impacts of coaching, with coaching supervision as one of the areas explored. The authors classify negative effects as unwanted, harmful, and direct connection to the coaching process to qualify. Research on negative effects in supervision have reported on the experiences during the supervision process and not necessarily the outcomes of supervision. The authors note that the relationship between supervision and negative effects is complex, especially when taking into account coaches' and clients' perspectives because they have been contradictory in some research. Despite the complexity, the authors suggest that the studies under review indicate that supervision is beneficial, especially for coaches high in neuroticism, and recommend supervision as one solution to mitigate the potential negative effects of coaching for coaches and clients alike.

BOOKS

Clutterbuck, D., Gannon, J., Hayes, S., Iordanou, I., Lowe, K., & MacKie, D. (Eds.). (2019). *The Practitioner's Handbook of Team Coaching.* **London: Routledge.**

This book is dedicated to team coaching and includes a chapter on team coaching supervision. In their chapter, Hodge & Clutterbuck (in Ch. 23) share their findings from their online survey (n = 55). Questions centered on

process, roles, and competencies to identify knowledge and experience of team coach supervisors. This type of work provides foundational information for future research, i.e. both qualitative and quantitative investigation can be used to explore in greater detail the themes identified. Both team coaching and team coaching supervision are growing trends in the field and require further investigation into the complexity that arises when shifting from 1-to-1 coaching supervision to supervising team coaching.

Hawkins, P., & Turner, E. (2019). *Systemic coaching: Delivering value beyond the individual.* **London: Routledge.**

This book is on systemic coaching and includes a chapter (Ch. 11) on systemic coaching supervision. The book targets those committed to using systems thinking in their work to meet the future needs of our societies. A systemic approach integrates the wider organizational, eco, and ethical systems in which individuals interact on a daily basis. Through a dialogical approach, the authors invite readers to a reflective space, providing a learning opportunity and challenge to think beyond traditional frameworks. They create awareness of the critical role of the coaches, not only at supporting leaders to be prepared for the future but also their ethical responsibility for revolutionizing coaching practice writ large to meet these needs. There is an overview about how to supervise coaches, ethical considerations for coaching and supervision, and criteria for systemic coach training. The authors include case examples and interviews from their own work along with other leading coaches and leaders globally.

Moral, M., & Angel, P. (2019). *Le coaching et sa supervision: Outils et pratiques.* **InterEditions.**

This book is in French. The authors are known for their Systemic Supervision with Constellations model which focuses on how the wider system and multiple stakeholders impact what is happening within the team.

van Nieuwerburgh, C., & Love, D. (2019). *Advanced coaching practice: Inspiring change in others.* **Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications Limited.**

This book is focused on the professional development of the coach and includes supervision as an important activity to help coaches develop their practice. The focus is on extending a coach's learning and enhancing their reflective practice. The book targets both beginner and advanced coaches. In the first chapter, the authors present a stage model, that includes supervision, of a coach's practice. The model represents four phases of coach learning and growth: Learning the core skills of coaching, Practicing techniques, Building performance, Gaining proficiency. In the first phase, the concept of coaching supervision will be introduced to novice coaches but the benefits of supervision may not be fully appreciated or realized. After more experience, shifting into phase two, supervision becomes an important part of a coach's development where the coach is taking facilitated supervision in groups. By phase three, the coach values supervision and includes it as an important part of their reflective practice. In the final phase of the model, supervision is considered central to the coach's way of working. However, the authors suggest that the stages are not linear, and that learning continues beyond proficiency.

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