How to best organise supervision in a “strong Coaching Culture” environment?

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A study carried out within EMCC France and presented at the *23rd International Mentoring and Coaching Conference* on March 2nd, 2017, in Edinburg, Scoland.

Summary

The concept of « Coaching Culture » has developed since its first appearance in the literature in 2003. The number of internal coaches has exploded during the same period. In addition, a large number of managers and executives were trained in coaching, even though they do not practice coaching necessarily.
“Coaching Culture” means that all coaches, as an organised system, contribute to the strategic objectives of the company in question. Ways of achieving this have been explored by many authors.
The next question is then: how do we supervise this complex system formed by external coaches, internal coaches, manager coaches, internal clients and possibly internal supervisors? Especially, are there more effective ways to achieve it, and are new concepts and techniques needed?

About the authors

Participants in this study are supervisors and/or researchers.
The following hold an ESQA certificate: Dr Jean Desroches (Undici), Cécile Reveneau (Undici), Monique Levy (Undici), Olivier Raynal Benoit (CSA), Emmanuel Müh (Undici).

The following have an ESIA from EMCC: Dr Michel Moral, Olivier Raynal Benoit.

Dr Michel Moral trains supervisors with Florence Lamy in Undici.

Context

Interest in the concept of "Coaching Culture" has increased sharply since pragmatic studies[1] have shown a significant correlation[2] between the level of development of a "Coaching Culture" and the financial results of companies, as well as the engagement of their employees.

[1] See: http://www.hci.org/hr-research/building-coaching-culture-increased-employee-engagement
[2] Let us remember that a correlation does not imply a causal relationship. This is illustrated in the following satirical story: A research is done in a school at the request of the Ministry of Education. For all children aged 3 to 10 years, the following are measured:
- the size of the right thumb (independent variable)
- the intellectual development (dependent variable)

Results: the correlation between these two variables is very high.

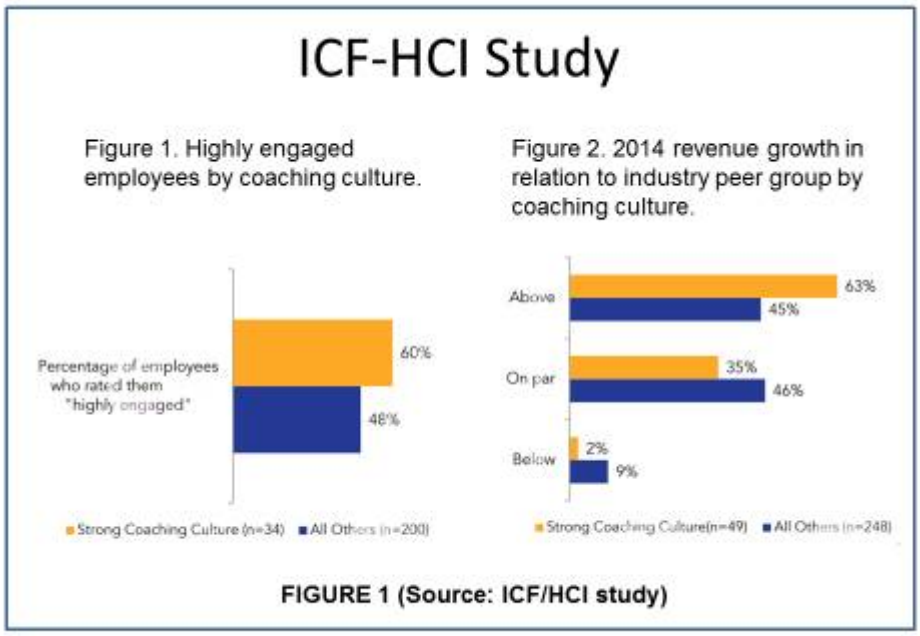

FIGURE 1 (Source: ICF/HCI study)

Introduced in 2003 by Janice Caplan, this way of making coaching a prevalent style of management and of working together has become more and more known in Anglo-Saxon countries and many companies have deployed the concept.

In 2014, HCI (Human Capital Institute) and ICF (International Coach Federation) jointly defined a composite index to measure the level of development of "Coaching Culture"[3] in a simple and straightforward manner (See annex 1).

At the same time, the number of internal coaches has exploded and now exceeds the number of external coaches in some countries. Interest in the notion of "Coaching Culture" has grown accordingly.

Many aspects of the "Coaching Culture" have been studied or are part of ongoing research. However, if the organization of coaching within large organizations becomes more and more mastered, the organization of supervision within the system comprising internal and external coaches is still in its very early stages.
In addition, new populations appear, such as managers trained in coaching, and new concepts emerge, such as the "supervision of managers or executives"[4]. This last one is becoming popular in France and needs to be positioned in the "coaching-mentoring nebula".

Objectives of the study

Conclusion of the final report: "*Thumb length causes intelligence*.". A "*thumb lengthening program*" is immediately launched and patents are taken out for thumb extensors.

[3] See : http://www.hci.org/hr-research/building-coaching-culture
[4] See for instance: Bismuth, Denis (2014) *Attention management!* Strasbourg: Colligence. Or Lamy, Florence & Moral, Michel (2015) *Les outils de la supervision*, Paris: InterEditions, p.168-170.

Only few studies exist about the organization of supervision of coaches in an organization. Some companies are just starting, while others have already embarked in creating a “strong Coaching Culture". However, based on the understanding of the significant impact of supervision on the quality of individual, team or organizational coaching, many new questions arise.

The objective of this study is then to explore the two following questions:

- Which organizations of the “coaching-supervision system” are most effective?
- Do we need new techniques?

Literature review

Coaching Culture

The first reference to "Coaching Culture" in the literature appears in a book written by Janice Caplan in 2003. Five other books on that topic have followed: Clutterbuck & Maggison (2005), Crane & al. (2007), Hawkins (2012, Jones & Gorell (2014) and Clutterbuck (2016).

Different definitions were given by these authors, for instance:

“*A Coaching Culture exists in an organisation* ***when a coaching approach is a key aspect of how the leaders, managers engage*** *and develop their people and engage their stakeholders, in ways that create increased individual performance and shared value for all stakeholders*.” (Hawkins, 2012, p.21)

“*A Coaching Culture is one* ***where people are empowered and where coaching happens at every level****. And, not only does it happen at every level, but it adds to bottom line performance. It is the recognized development tool that touches every part of the employee life cycle*.” (Jones J. & Gorell, 2014, p.13)

The general idea, in the above and in other definitions, is that both the employees and the company benefit from coaching practiced at every level, which we will call the “pervasion of coaching”.

The concept that the objectives of the coaching missions should be connected to the strategic goals and objectives of the organisation also appears clearly.

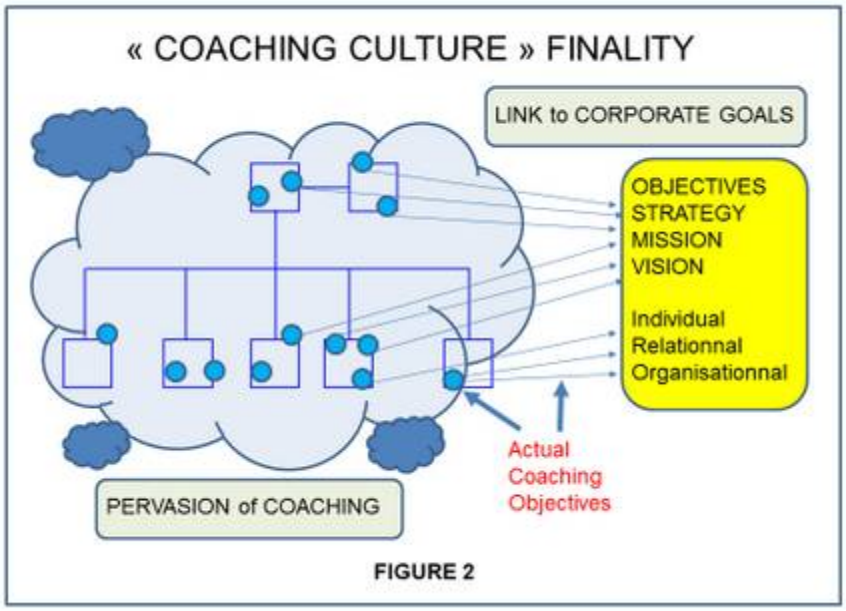

FIGURE 2

Several tools were developed to measure the level of pervasion or/and the strength of the Coaching Culture.

Let us note that, in France, there is often a confusion between "Coaching Culture" and "desired Corporate Culture". Many people think that "Coaching Culture" is a set of values that determine how to behave as coaches, i.e. deliver feedback, listen actively, communicate openly, etc…. Thinking "Coaching Culture" as a tool that helps the transformation of a "Corporate Culture" is still a step to be reached in this country.

Supervision of internal coaches

The role of supervision in internal coaching or in Coaching Culture was addressed during several international supervision conferences, especially in the following: Hawkins (2012), Maxwell (2011), Long (2012) and Field (2012). Also, two doctoral dissertations are related to the role of supervision in internal coaching: Field (2014) and van Reenen (2014). The latter summarizes its key findings as follows:

"*There is value derived from internal coaching; confidentiality, safety and credibility are important considerations for internal coaching efficiency; communities of practice are valuable for internal coaches but are not self-organising;*

There are issues such as coaching versus mentoring; measuring and communicating the value of coaching, reward and recognition for internal coaches need to be addressed for long-term success;

It is important to develop awareness and strategies to better manage ethical dilemmas within coach supervision for internal coaches; important contracts (both formally and informally) need to be identified and put in place within the coach supervision system; the role and purpose of coach supervision must be clear from the start;

It is not conclusive whether internal or external placement of the coach supervision role in relationship to the organisation is more favourable; there are unique functions of coach supervision within an internal coaching context and there, are factors in the organisation, including organisational culture, that both support or hinder coach supervision."

Internal supervision

The possibility of internal supervision is scarcely addressed (Long, 2012; Field, 2012). Two questions are raised by these authors:

- "*Who is the main client of the internal supervisor?*" and, in relation with this, the possible questioning of the organisation by the internal supervisor.

- And, correlated with the first question: "*What kind of contract is needed between supervisors and the organisation and between internal supervisors and the organisation*".

Finally, most of the authors agree on the fact that supervisors of internal coaches need much more systemic skills than supervisors of external coaches.

Methodology

A total of 22 French organisations were surveyed: 10 Public Sector or Government Institutions and 12 private companies. The number of employees in those organisations varies from 1300 to 260000 (mean = 61400, standard deviation = 70000).

The ICF/HCI questionnaire was used to assess the "Coaching Culture Index". The average CCI is 3 but, as can be seen in the table below, there are in fact two peaks, at 2 and at 4. According to the ICF/HCI definition (see Annex 1) there is only one "Strong Coaching Culture" in the sample:

ICF/HCI index	1	1,5	2	2,5	3	3,5	4	4,5	5	5,5	6
Occurrences	1	0	**7**	3	0	1	**6**	1	1	0	0
Government			4	1	2		2		1		
Private	1		3	2	0	1	4	1			

During interviews, the following information was collected:

- How is coaching and supervision organised?

- How are the supervisors controlled?

Five possible layouts were identified (see figure 3 for the details, where the last column shows the number of occurrences in the sample):

Organisation of Supervision

Mode	Coaching link to strategy	Facilitate coaches	Request IC Superv.	Request EC Superv.	Quality Control Of Super.	Facilitate Superv.	Internal Superv.	N
1A	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	11
1B	SOME	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	3
2	SOME	Some (internal)	« Weak Yes »	« Weak Yes »	Informal	I only	NO	5
3A	FULL	YES	FIRM YES	FIRM YES	Informal	YES	Y/N	3
3B	FULL	YES	FIRM YES	FIRM YES	Strong Process	YES	YES	0

Facilitation of Coaches (same for supervisors)
Coach requested to be supervised

Quality control of the supervisor

Internal supervisor

: Coaches (Internal, External) are coordinated and informed
: « Weak Yes » means that Coach declaration is enough
: FIRM YES means that name of supervisor is checked
: Informal = Discussion with the supervisor or trust reputation
: Strong Process = Check training and accreditation
: Y/N = internal coaches trained to supervision but do not supervise

FIGURE 3

These layouts can be represented as a systemic graph. Figure 4 presents **Mode 1a**:

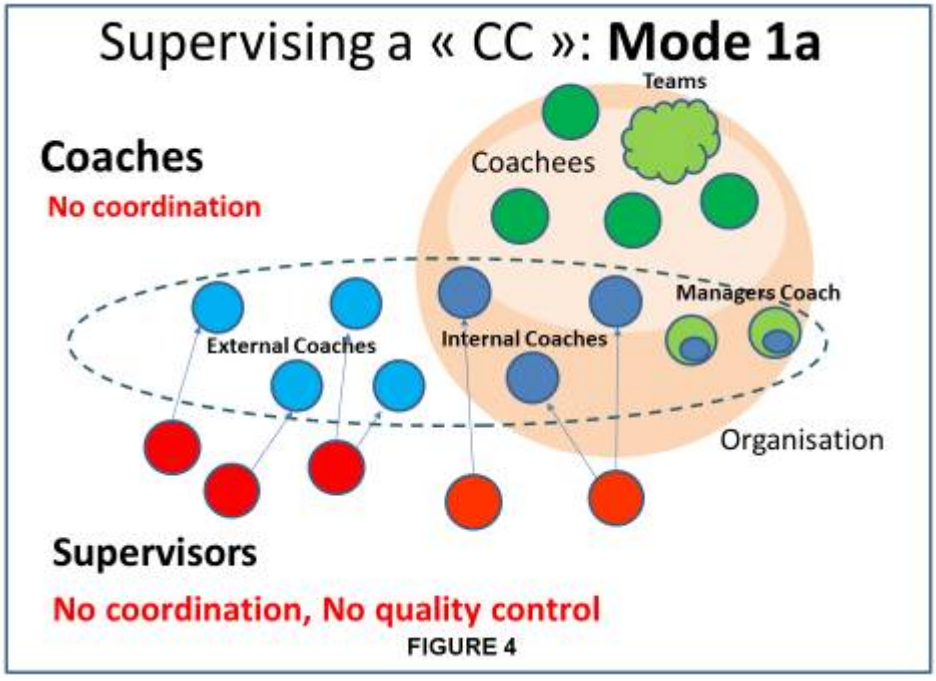

FIGURE 4

Whereas figure 5 presents **Mode 3a**:

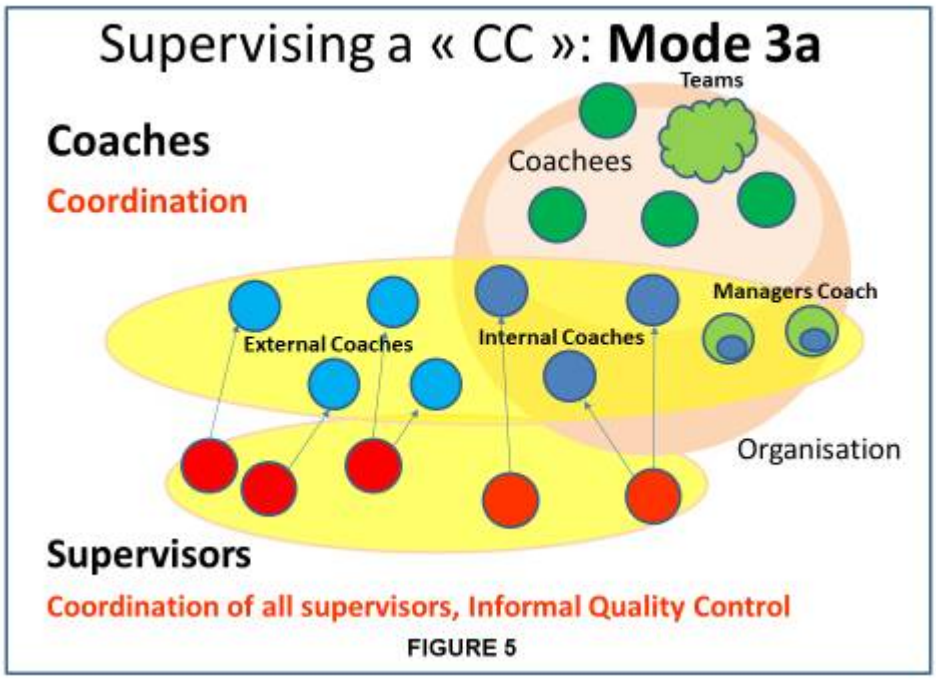

FIGURE 5

Results

The first question that arose quite often was: "*What could be the reasons for organizing supervision?*". We have to admit that the pragmatic studies related to the benefits of supervision are limited and those related to the organization of supervision within a large company are almost non-existent.

For companies that have not reached a "Strong Coaching Culture" yet, the question often was: "*What is the role of the supervisor in the company where he/she supervises coaches?*".

For the very few companies in the sample that are close to possessing a "Strong Coaching Culture" the main question was still: "*What is the role of the supervisor* ***in the strategy of*** *the company where he supervises coaches*". Given that we have very few of those in the total sample, this question remains open.

Finally, as mentioned above, the concept of Coaching Culture, as defined by Peter Hawkins (2012) for instance, is not well understood in France. For example, only few of the surveyed organizations had defined a clear strategy about long term development of the action of coaching.

In fact, what stands out from the interviews is that the knowledge and understanding of the role of supervision by sponsors and executives ranges from very limited to completely unknown. The control of the skills and professionalism of the supervisors is performed through interviews but not on the base of training and/or accreditation. Clearly, supervision still appears very mysterious!

From a client standpoint, i.e. the companies having embarked on establishing a Coaching Culture, the missing information about supervision is expected to be delivered by the coaching

and supervision professional bodies. Unfortunately, the available information is scarce, and the coaching community does limited effort to promote supervision.

However, in an organization where internal coaching has been established for a while, internal coaches themselves look for supervision even without knowing what it is exactly that they are looking for. They are the greatest proponents of the need for supervision, and look at more senior internal coaches for support and for fulfilling the role of supervisors. Such senior internal coaches then bear the responsibility to be trained as supervisors and to explain to various stakeholders what supervision entails.

Discussion

The study briefly presented above highlighted several concerns. Possible responses to them are as follows:

Role of the supervisor

The way supervision is done could positively impact companies in the following ways:
- In the "Developmental function" of supervision, the supervisor can focus on the coaching competencies in line with the objectives of the company. A number of companies have developed their own coaching competency framework by taking competencies from the EMCC, ICF or EC Vision frameworks.
- In the "Resourcing function" of supervision, the supervisor can focus on the company patterns or cultural elements that impact the coach in his/her work. Let us note that the parallel process[5] can be amplified when the coach is an internal coach.
- In the "Qualitative function" there could also exist company patterns that impact the values or ethics of the coach, who needs help in dealing with those.

Who is the client?

Supervision of a heterogeneous group of internal and external coaches might create discrepancies and raises two key questions:

- Who is the client? This is the famous "loyalty question" raised in supervision as an ethical dilemma. This is illustrated with systemic diagrams in figures 6 and 7.

- What is the risk of inconsistency in supervising external and internal coaches? While the supervisor of internal coaches is supposed to have some consideration for the goals and strategy of the client organization, the supervisor of external coaches is often far from this concern, especially when he supervises coaches from different companies.

[5] The concept of parallel process has its origin in the psychoanalytic concepts of transference and countertransference. The parallel process occurs when the coach recreates the present problem and emotions of the client relationship within the coaching relationship. The same mechanism occurs between the supervisor and the coach.

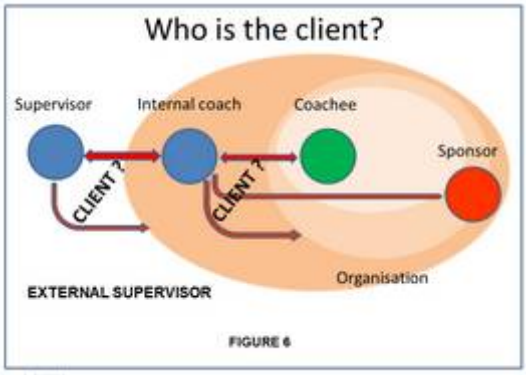

FIGURE 6

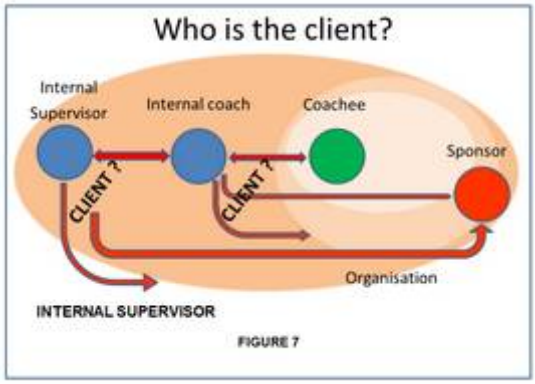

FIGURE 7

The limits and risks of the internal coaching are well known: *manipulation*, use of a person to achieve one's own goals, *substitution*, use of a person to do something that is supposed to be done by someone else, *last chance coaching* and *prescribed coaching*. Typical examples are the use of a coach to fire someone or the use of a coach to do some kind of training.

The supervisor as well as the coach are both exposed to these breaches and risks.

A key question is: "what kind of control can the company have on the supervision of its external coaches?". *A priori* none, except possibly for the control of the quality of the supervisors. But no-one in our sample told external coaches: "If you want to coach here, we first need to meet your supervisor.".

Contracts with an internal supervisor

The concept of 3-cornered contract (English, 1975) might be useful to analyse the different situations that internal supervision creates:

- In hierarchical companies, there is a 3-cornered contract, formal or not, between the coach, the client and the organisation (represented by the sponsor).

- In matrix organisations, the sponsor can be either the line or functional manager of the client, or be represented by another function, for instance HR.

- In organisations with a "strong Coaching Culture", in addition to the above, the sponsor is sometimes the function or person in charge of managing coaching (e.g. a Chief Coaching Executive).

There are two possibilities, depending on who is the sponsor; there are represented as systemic diagrams in figures 8 and 9:

- If the sponsor is a Chief Coaching Executive, he/she can organise and coordinate the 3-way meetings and draft the 3-cornered contracts in a balanced way.

- If the sponsor is the line or HR manager, he/she organises the 3-way meetings between the coach, the client and him/herself. The relationship with the supervisor is with someone else within the organisation who might not try to coordinate with the sponsor. Risks of imbalanced 3-cornered contracts are higher.

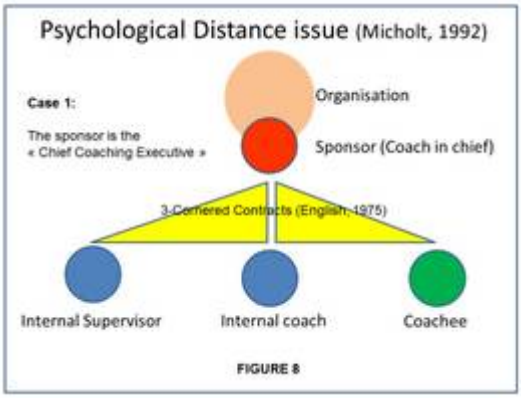

FIGURE 8

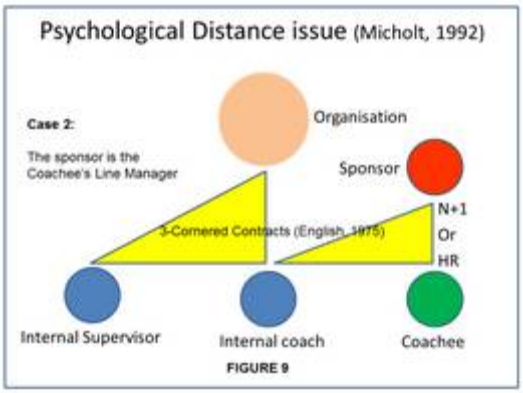

FIGURE 9

Micholt (1992) added the notion of "perceived psychological distance" to the concept of 3-cornered contract. She demonstrated and analysed in detail how an imbalanced 3C contract can be the source of conflicts and psychological games. This work can be a source of inspiration for sponsors and Chief Coaching Executives.

Which organizations of the "coaching-supervision system" are most effective?

This is one of the questions raised at the beginning of this study. Supervision is seen in Europe as a need because "it is difficult to make your bed if you stay in it". This metaphor says that, just as a coachee, a coach needs to reflect on his/her professional activity with someone else.
Coaching, mentoring and supervision are therefore interdependent and there is a logic in trying to organise this system.
We have seen above that there are several options and more research is needed to explore the pros and cons of these options.

Do we need new techniques?
Clearly, we are not yet there. More research is needed to explore this question.

Conclusion

A lot of efforts have been made by the coaching and supervision professional bodies to build competence frameworks, quality awards and accreditations. A lot of resources were also involved in these efforts: working groups, training of assessors, panels, etc…. The positions of the professional bodies on these matters have not converged completely, but we can hope that such a convergence will be included in their strategies.

At the same time, the EQF (European Qualification Framework) begins to be implemented at the national level as NQF (National Qualification Frameworks). Accreditations and Quality Awards created by the professional bodies will, or will not, be recognized by the national authorities who are creating their own[6]. This is putting pressure on coaches and supervisors who want to be recognized as professionals delivering a high quality service.

[6] 2016 was marked in France by two major events, one concerning the recognition of coach as a profession, and the other concerning schools providing coaching or supervision training:

In February 2016, the *National Commission of Professional Certifications* (CNCP) took another step towards the recognition of the profession of professional coach. Since then, a number of certifications issued by coaching

Consequently, there is another challenge for the professional bodies: convergence with EQF/NQF in the field of coaching, mentoring and supervision. EMCC France and EMCC International devote a large amount of resources on this topic.

Quality is not only a question of professionalism. The purpose of this paper was also to provide a systemic vision and question the organisation of coaching and supervision in companies. It is now time to consider all the results that research has gained over the years, and build a comprehensive summary of the value of supervision as well as an objective analysis of the risks when supervision is not properly executed.

We suggest that a meta-analysis of the existing literature should be the next step. Obviously, this should be driven by an international team, including representatives of professional bodies (EMCC, ICF, AC, and ANSE), clients, national governments and the European Union.

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Conferences

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schools have been registered in the *National Directory of Professional Competences* (RNCP). This registration is now a *sine qua non* condition for coaching students / trainees to obtain funding.

As of January 1st 2017, the main sponsors (*Authorized Collecting Joint Authorities)* have the authority by decree to require coaching schools to meet quality criteria or to have the quality of the school recognized by a third party (through labels, certifications, etc.). The *National Council for Employment, Vocational Training and Guidance* (CNEFOP) accredits these third parties. EMCC is in the process to be recognized by the CNEFOP.

Maxwell, Alison, July 1st 2011, *Supervision for the internal coach*, 1st International Conference on Coaching Supervision, Wheatley Campus, Oxford.

Long, Katherine, June 23rd 2012, *Internal Coach to Internal Supervisor – Exploring 'good enough' supervision in an organizational context*, 2nd International Conference on Coaching Supervision, Wheatley Campus, Oxford.

Field, Carole, June 23rd 2012, *Creating a unique Supervision model for internal coaching: where is the evidence?* 2nd International Conference on Coaching Supervision, Wheatley Campus, Oxford.

Doctoral dissertations

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van Reenen, Michelle (2014), *Developing a conceptual framework for coach supervision of internal coaches at organisations*. Stellenbosch University.

ANNEX 1

ICF-HCI Study

Among the responding organizations, 15% (n = 51) are classified as having a **strong coaching culture**, determined by having scores of 5 or 6 on the composite index.

Coaching Culture Composite* (CCI)

1. Strongly agree/agree that employees value coaching.
2. Strongly agree/agree that senior executives value coaching.
3. Managers/leaders (and/or internal coach practitioners) spend above-average time on weekly coaching activities (19% is average for managers; 16% is average for internal coach practitioners).
4. Managers/leaders (and/or internal coaches) received accredited coach training.
5. Coaching is a fixture in the organization with a dedicated line item in the budget.
6. All employees in the organization have an equal opportunity to receive coaching from a professional coach practitioner.

*One point was generated for each item for a maximum of 6 points

http://coachfederation.org/about/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=3674