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Ethical dilemmas and tricky decisions: A global perspective of coaching supervisors' practices in coach ethical decision-making

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Abstract

This paper examines ethical dilemmas and tricky decision-making among coaching supervisors internationally. Supervisors were selected for the first study in this wider project due to the pivotal role they play in coaching practice and the resolution of ethical dilemmas. The research reveals that ethical decision-making is an under-developed area of research given coaching's growth as an intervention. The study argues that coaching needs to develop an alternative perspective on coach confidentiality, with greater consideration to the circumstances when 'confidentiality' can be broken, greater use of contracting and improved coach and coach supervisor training in ethics, ethical sensitivity and ethical decision-making.

Key words: Ethics, coaching, supervision, contracting, dilemmas.

Introduction

Coaching can be considered as both simple and complex. Its simplicity is that it may involve just two people in a conversation about learning and change. However, a decade or more of coaching research suggests that coaching is also complex. It can embrace individuals, teams or groups, and can often involve conversations exploring goals as well as issues of identity, morality and personal dilemmas. It can be on achieving improvements in performance or on wellbeing and interpersonal relationships. In these complex conversations how do coaches make decisions when presented with issues that press against the boundaries of their experience, values, ethical codes and national law? How do supervisors help in this process? And what is the evidence that supervision, legislation, values or professional ethical codes can help coaches navigate their ways through these tricky cases.

This study is the first in a series of research studies examining coaching ethics and ethical decision-making through multiple lenses. This paper explores the views of coach supervisors, who are typically highly experienced coaches, and how they help coaches to work with, reflect upon and decide tricky issues within their practice. Supervisors were selected for the first phase of the research due to the pivotal role they play in coaching practice and the resolution of ethical dilemmas, seeing the most challenging and difficult issues, and thus being able to adopt an overview of such issues and how such issues may be best resolved.

The area of ethics in coaching and supervision, and the evidence for supervision's value as a vehicle to do so, remain under-researched. Butwell noted that while protection of the client had been mentioned in literature, "no literature was identified that provided a well-evidenced rationale for the supervision of coaches" (Butwell, 2006, p. 49). This lack of research was identified as a topic by the Global Convention in Coaching in 2008 (GCC, 2008). Since then only a relatively small

number of publications have appeared. While the topic of ethics is featured in a number of book chapters (Passmore & Mortimer, 2011; Lane, 2011; Jackson & Clutterbuck, 2011; Lowman, 2012; Hodge, 2013; Hawkins & Smith, 2013; Iordanou & Williams, 2017) and standalone books (Anderson & Williams, 2005; Steare, 2006; Passmore, 2011; Carroll and Shaw, 2013; Iordanou, Hawley & Iordanou, 2017) the research into the topic is sparse (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Passmore, 2009; Duffy & Passmore, 2010; Grant, 2012; Hodge, 2014; Lawrence & Whyte, 2014; Sheppard, 2017; Moral & Lamy, 2017). Given a decade or more of coaching research, and the centrality of this issue to practice, this remains a surprisingly short list of research and writing.

The situation is different in parallel areas of practice, counselling, psychology and business, where ethics has been an important part of practice and in the case of business ethics has grown significantly in importance over the past decade (PRME, 2017). This lack of progress may reflect coaching's relatively new status as a profession, its lack of regulation or professional barriers to entry, or simply coaching's difficulty in stimulating quality research in comparison with these other areas of comparable practice.

A similar challenge can be made of coaching supervision. A number of writers have discussed this previously, offering experiential perspectives on the benefits of supervision drawn from surveys and interviews and making recommendation for its effective use (Hawkins & Schwenk, 2006). And there is evidence that take-up is increasing albeit it at different levels globally (Hawkins & Turner, 2017). However, to date empirical research exploring the impact of supervision is sparse.

Almost a decade ago, Moyes (2009, p. 162) noted that coaching supervision as yet had no "specific theoretical base or model" and had instead "borrowed from elsewhere" especially from the therapeutic professions including social work. Moyes' (2009) review of the supervision literature concluded that many questions remain unanswered. A follow up study in 2016 of the literature relating to business coaching supervision found a similar lack of evidence about coaching supervision's impact, highlighting just seven pieces of research between 2006 and 2014 (Joseph, 2016, p. 165).

Despite this lack of empirical evidence coaching supervision has become embedded as the recommended practice by a number of the leading professional coaching bodies. Coaches see access to a qualified and more experienced coach / supervisor as a valuable aid in helping work through tricky or difficult issues in their practice (Passmore, Brown & Csigas, 2017). In professional terms, the Association for Coaching (AC) and European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) Code states:

Members will engage in supervision with a suitably qualified supervisor or peer supervision group with a level of frequency that is appropriate to their coaching or mentoring practice. (Global Code of Ethics for Coaches and Mentors, 2016).

This position is not universal, for example the International Coach Federation (ICF), the largest coaching body in USA, Canada, Latin America, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, views supervision as one of a variety of methods for reflective practice. More recently the ICF has strengthened its position on coaching supervision, by actively recommending it (ICF, 2017a), with a further commitment to undertake research in the field.

Methodology

This research used an online survey, SurveyMonkey, with the objective of gathering responses from a diverse and geographically dispersed sample. The research survey was titled Tricky Dilemmas and the covering explanation invited supervisors to share how they dealt with tricky decisions and ethical dilemmas.

The questions were drawn from several sources. The impetus started with a case of the UK police seeking a coach's client notes (Turner & Woods, 2015). Subsequently through presentations (such as Turner & Passmore, 2017) and literature (Iordanou *et al.*, 2017, Hawkins, 2011) further questions were developed. An initial pilot was constructed leading to a final survey. The aim was to explore supervisor attitudes towards ethical issues, particularly around legality, examining how they worked with their coaching clients to help them make better and more ethically based decisions. A further aim was to identify themes which could be explored in more detail in a subsequent qualitative study with some of the supervisors who took part in the survey. This is the subject of a second paper. A third paper will look at the responses from the professional bodies.

The survey was carried out between April and November 2016 and participants were drawn from a network of supervisors known to the researchers and their extended network using a snowballing technique, which is particularly suited to reaching hidden and harder to reach samples (Vogt, 1999). Participation was voluntary and both anonymity and confidentiality were assured.

The sample consisted of supervisors mainly in the UK, Europe and USA/Canada. Over 120 individuals were identified, through professional bodies, organizations for trained supervisors (like the Global Supervisors' Network) and recognized coach supervision training providers. Each was sent an email to participate, with a link to the online question. The survey consisted of 15 questions (see Table 1), which included multiple-choice questions and two questions allowing free text answers. A pilot was undertaken with a small sample of supervisors, prior to the formal launch, and feedback used to modify and clarify questions.

Analysis of the multiple-choice questions was done using descriptive statistics, drawing on the Excel tables and graphs generated by the tools available from SurveyMonkey. An inductive approach was followed in the analysis of the qualitative data for Questions 11 and 12, allowing the theory to follow the data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2000). There were 18 written responses to Q11 and 63 for Q12. With these multiple responses, all the comments were put into Word and manually coded according to their content. This allowed an observation of arising themes. For Q12 a second stage was used, creating a more coherent set of codes from the themes, and applying the codes to observe the prevalence of any specific trends.

The survey has potential bias and limitations. As the survey link was distributed through the researchers' professional networks, the respondents may be considered to be more likely to belong to professional bodies and professional development networks. Therefore, they are self-selecting and may choose to adhere to a code of ethics and be more reflective practitioners than typical coach supervisors. A further limitation is that supervisors who have had experience and understanding of ethical dilemmas, or are interested in the topic, were more likely to take part. For the first stage of this research into ethical decision-making, the authors also relied exclusively on self-report data.

Table 1: Research questions

Q1	I encourage my supervisees to understand what their values are and to use these values to guide their decisions. Please choose the response that most closely matches your practice.
Q2	I encourage my supervisees to explicitly refer to their professional code of ethics when making a decision regarding a tricky dilemma.
Q3	The role of contracts See Table 3 for the questions
Q4	I encourage my supervisee to speak to their professional indemnity insurer or a legal adviser if necessary, should the circumstances warrant it when making a decision.
Q5	If my supervisee is breaking the law, I will instruct them what to do.
Q6	If my supervisee's client is breaking the law, I will instruct my supervisee what to do.
Q7	If my supervisee or their client is breaking the law I will speak to my own supervisor to ensure I am behaving ethically and legally and in the interests of all parties.
Q8	If my supervisee does not follow my instructions and breaks the law, I have an obligation to always report them to their professional body.
Q9	If my supervisee does not follow my instructions and breaks the law, I have an obligation to always report them to the police.
Q10	Managing conflict between different requirements See Table 4 for the questions
Q11 with comments	Dealing with poor coaching practice See Table 5 for the questions
Q12 with comments	What other factors are important for practitioners to consider within their ethical supervision/coaching practice in making good decisions?

Results

A total of 106 individuals responded, although only 101 participants' data was included in the analysis below. Five participants were excluded; three participants were excluded on the grounds they were not coach supervisors and two participants did not answer a significant portion of the questions.

Of the 101 participants, 65.35% were female supervisors, 71% operated mainly in the UK. The full geographical spread is shown in Table 2. In terms of identity 81.63% described themselves as a 'coach', 5.1% as 'psychologists' and the remaining 13.27% selected 'Other', as opposed to 'Therapist/Counsellor' and 'HR/L&D' which all attracted a zero.

Table 2: Top 3 areas of operation for participants (supervisors)

	1st	2nd	3rd	Total of 1, 2 and 3
UK	71	10	4	85
EU (excluding the UK)	11	38	8	57
US/Canada	11	5	9	25
Latin America	2	4	3	9
Asia	2	4	8	14
Middle East	2	2	7	11
Australia/New Zealand	2	0	3	5
Africa	1	3	4	8

The first area explored the factors that supervisors invite their coaches to consider when making tricky decisions, starting with values. A total of 62% said they either consistently encouraged their coaches to consider their personal values when discussing a tricky decision or dilemma or did so with some supervisees. What was interesting to note is that 20.79% of supervisors never spoke about the role of values in decision-making.

The second factor was professional codes of ethics. Here the number rose, with only 7.92% suggesting this was not a factor they asked coaches to explicitly refer to when making such decisions. 24.75% suggested it was a possible factor to consider but depended on the circumstances.

The third factor was the contract. When asked what was most relevant in making their decision, and given two choices from a range of answer options, nearly three-quarters of respondents agreed or strongly agreed the individual and the organizational contract were a factor to consider (Table 3). Only six respondents felt the organizational contract was not relevant, and five that the individual contract was not relevant. This may reflect the primacy attached to the coaching contract. However, such documents are unlikely to cover all the types of issues that can occur, as it would be almost impossible to define and specify every eventuality within a commercial contract.

The fourth factor explored the role of professional indemnity insurers. 9.90% of the supervisors had spoken with or encouraged their coaches to speak with their insurers, to gauge the position under their Professional Indemnity Insurance cover (PII, not universally available). A large portion, 81.18%, considered this a factor saying their decision to advise their coaches would be dependent on the circumstances; as yet they had not felt the need to give that advice.

This may illustrate how few coaches and coaching supervisors understand the inclusive nature of PII cover, in particular the fact that many insurers provide a free legal helpline which can offer advice, a valuable resource for those working in personal development.   It also provides practical support in cases of alleged professional misconduct including support through a professional body's complaints procedure (AC, 2017; EMCC, 2012; ICF, 2017d). It is worth noting, however, that PII cover is not available in all countries.

Table 3: I encourage my supervisee to refer to the contract with the organisation and the individual when making a decision. Which is most relevant in making your decision – please rank your top 2 choices.

Answer Options (ranked by most popular first choice)	1st choice	2nd choice	Total (of 1 and 2 choice)
I strongly agree that the coaching contract with the organization is relevant in such decisions	27	22	49
I strongly agree that the coaching contract with the individual, where different or offering additional, private outcomes, is relevant.	26	20	46
I agree that the coaching contract with the individual, where different or offering additional, private outcomes, is relevant.	20	9	29
The coaching contract with the individual, where different or offering additional, private outcomes, may be relevant and I may encourage my supervisee to refer to it sometimes.	15	8	23
I agree that the coaching contract with the organization is relevant in such decisions	6	23	29
The organization contract may be relevant, and I may encourage my supervisee to refer to it sometimes	6	12	18
I disagree that the coaching contract with the organization is relevant in such decisions.	0	2	2
I disagree that the coaching contract with the individual, where different or offering additional, private outcomes, is relevant in such decisions.	0	2	2
I strongly disagree that the coaching contract with the organization is relevant in such decisions.	3	1	4
I strongly disagree that the coaching contract with the individual, where different or offering additional, private outcomes, is relevant in such decisions.	1	2	3

This low priority is highlighted in Table 4, managing conflict between different requirements. Professional insurers were selected by only one respondent as the most important factor and six respondents taking into account second choices; this is similar to "their supervisor" with one as first choice and four as first or second choice.

Table 4: Managing conflict between different requirements - Supervisor responses to the statement: "When there is a conflict between different aspects, I encourage my supervisees to pay most attention to:"

	1st choice	2nd choice
The Law	34	14
Their Professional Ethical Code	27	31
Their Personal Values	15	15
What is most appropriate for the work they do in their business and the clients they serve	14	7
The Individual Client Contract	5	12
The Organizational Contract	4	11
Their Professional Indemnity Insurer	1	5
Their Supervisor	1	3

The fifth theme related to the actions a supervisor would take when a coach highlighted any illegal act, either by themself or their client. In respect of law breaking, supervisors were much more likely to act. In relation to their supervisees, a total of 24.75% would instruct their supervisees on what to do in the case of *any* illegal act (Diagram 1); in the case of their supervisee's client that was 16.83% (Diagram 2).

In addition, supervisors would also instruct their supervisees in the case of 'serious acts' and 'mandatory reporting issues': 40.59% of supervisors said they would instruct their supervisees in such circumstances; when it came to the coach's client breaking the law the figure was 39.6%. However, 8.91% of respondents stated they would not instruct their supervisees what to do, even when these were mandatory cases (Diagram 1), and if the coach's client was breaking the law, the figure was nearly double, 16.83% (Diagram 2).

The sixth area related to the actions a supervisor would take if their supervisee didn't follow instruction and broke the law, 20% of supervisors would report them to the police in all cases of illegality and a further 62% would do so, depending on the circumstances (Q9). That left 18% who claimed they would not report any act. This area is discussed in the requirements in the Global Code of Ethics (AC/EMCC) which states:

Members will have a clear agreement with clients and sponsors about the conditions under which confidentiality will not be maintained (e.g. illegal activity, danger to self or others etc.) and gain agreement to that limit of confidentiality where possible (Global Code of Ethics for Coaches and Mentors, 2016).

The ICF (2017b) places a similar responsibility on its members about the conditions under which confidentiality might be breached "e.g. illegal activity, pursuant to valid court order or subpoena; imminent or likely risk of danger to self or to others; etc." Their code tells members to ensure that "client and sponsor, student, mentee, or supervisee voluntarily and knowingly agree in writing to that limit of confidentiality," and of the possibility that the appropriate authorities may need to be informed.

These results raise some potentially serious issues for coaches and professional bodies. Most professional codes require compliance with national laws, and most highlight the importance of reporting serious illegality. The responses may reflect what we would argue is an incorrect view

that coaching is always an entirely confidential conversation, much like that with a priest, from which nothing should ever be reported.

However, such a position could prove dangerous, regardless of professional codes, with supervisors and coaches themselves potentially breaking the law where mandatory reporting is required. While such cases are likely to be extremely rare, a failure to act could result in legal action against the supervisor or supervisee. More generally it places those involved, supervisor, supervisee and client in a potentially colluding relationship; there may be secrets each feels uncomfortable holding, but they do so feeling bound by a code of confidentiality which may, occasionally, be misplaced.

Supervisors saw themselves as having an ethical link to the professional bodies (Q8). When asked "If my supervisee does not follow my instructions and breaks the law, I have an obligation to always report them to their professional body", of the sample, 27% said they would report all failures to the professional body; 50% felt it would depend on the circumstances, and of those 30% said they would do so in mandatory reporting situations or serious criminal acts, and 20% in the case of mandatory situations only. Almost a quarter, 23%, disagreed it was their obligation to report.

Supervisor were asked to consider what they would do if their supervisee was demonstrating "extremely poor practice in their coaching with clients" (Q11) such as breaking confidentiality without good reason, acting or conspiring with illegality or not acting in the client's best interests (Table 5) and given a range of options. Understandably an emerging theme was the importance of the circumstances. The preference was to encourage further training, and to work with the supervisee on their values, although the third highest response was to stop working with the coach. The use of recordings was also seen as a useful tool.

Diagram 1: Supervisor instructions - Supervisor responses to the statement: "If my supervisee is breaking the law, I will instruct them what to do".
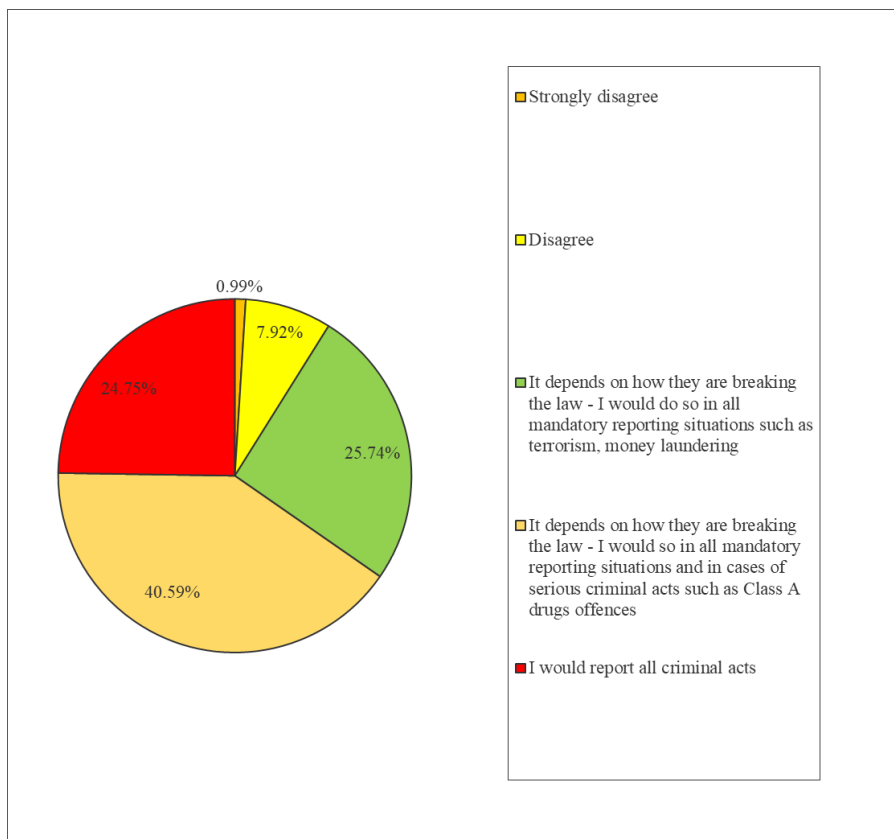
Diagram 2: Breaking the law - Supervisor responses to the statement: "If my supervisee's client is breaking the law, I will instruct my supervisee what to do."
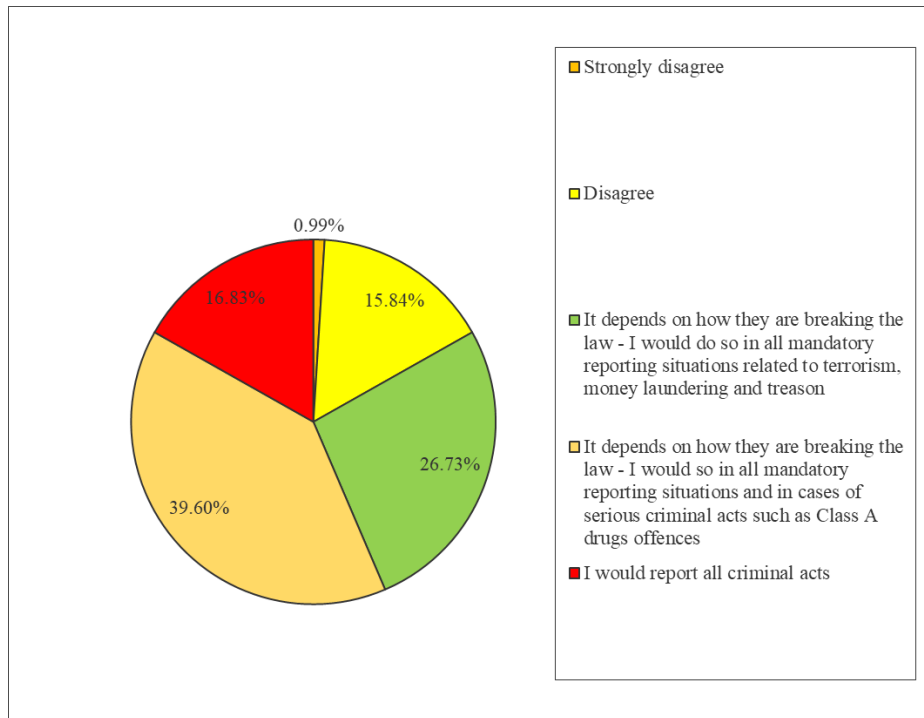

Table 5: If I believe my supervisee is demonstrating extremely poor practice in their coaching with clients, for example breaking confidentiality, acting or conspiring with illegality, or consistently acting in their own best interests rather than the client's, and this does not improve despite being worked on through supervision, I would have a duty to.

Answers ranked by "Always"	Always	Sometimes	It depends on the circumstances	Occasionally	Never
Encourage them to do further training as a coach	38	29	17	9	3
Work with them on their values	31	33	20	6	5
Stop working with this supervisee	27	18	42	5	3
Report them to their professional body	19	24	45	6	4
Ask them to bring (further) recordings to a supervision session to work through	16	31	23	8	15
Stop working with this supervisee and encourage them to find another supervisor	15	19	43	8	6
Report this to someone in the client's organization	4	14	47	4	20
Report them to the police	2	7	63	5	13

In 18 written responses to Q11, the respondents raised the challenges and nuances of their duties a supervisor. The key theme was the importance of context and the need to avoid treating ethics as having simplistic answers. One respondent summed this up:

> *It is never black and white in the processing of dilemmas unless there is criminality involved. (Even then the Professional Body may have to take a Trade Union Stance to support and assist the coach or supervisor if it proceeds to prosecution.) (Female supervisor, UK).*

Another argued that while it is "Never black and white - first loyalty is to the supervisee and their client not the Professional Body" (Male supervisor, UK). One supervisor talked of the "need to differentiate between intentional 'poor' practice and lack of experience/ understanding/ knowledge. In all cases I would need to be assured that the clients were being otherwise well-served" (Male supervisor, Europe). One sums up the dilemma many supervisors face: "I work with the supervisee to improve their practice and I need their trust if we are to work openly and constructively" (Male supervisor, UK).

Coach wellbeing was also raised by a few respondents with a recommendation for further training or:

> *other support and guidance (linked to the AC Code of Ethics) … such as taking an extended break/rest from coaching practice to attend to their physical or emotional wellbeing … if they have had a personal, emotional or physical trauma and when they feel ready have a supervision session to check their fitness to resume coaching (Female supervisor, UK).*

Emphasis is also placed on the fundamental role of the supervisor to encourage the supervisee's reflective practice. As one respondent says supervisors need to make certain they *"do not impose their own personal values on the supervisee"* (Female supervisor, USA/Canada).

The final question asked supervisors to suggest other factors they considered important in making good decisions within their ethical supervision/coaching practice. These were the key themes:

Table 6: What other factors are important for practitioners to consider within their ethical supervision/coaching practice in making good decisions?

Ranking	Factors mentioned	Percentage (n=63)
1	Looking at self-awareness, bias and reactions of the coach and the supervisor	25.4%
2	Examining context such as the impact on others including clients, legal requirements	20.6%
3	The wellbeing of the supervisee	12.&%
4	The role of contracting and boundary management	11.1%
5	Cultural norms	9.5%
6	Supervision/reflective practice	4.8%

One word emerged consistently, that of impact – on the coach, on the client, on the organization/system, on stakeholders and on the profession. Again, the underlying theme was that of the subtleties in this area – there were no rights or wrongs, given the many contextual issues from culture to values, motives to law. The complexities of this area are picked up by these comments:

What are my triggers…? What other ethical situations are involved in this particular dilemma or situation? …How does this affect the sphere of influence of my client? How does this impact the community? Where is the line between doing what's "right" in terms of the law and what's "right" in terms of larger considerations on other scales (family, coach, community, organisation, country, planet etc.)? And how would I know? There are SO many subtleties to consider... (Female supervisor, Australia/New Zealand)

"the application of ethical principles can only be within a moral context, and that is cultural, situational, temporal and, ultimately, subjective" (Male supervisor, UK)

Such thought provoking questions…it reminds me of the complexity of these situations and taking into account the short-term goals to protect the client, the organization and the professionalism of our practice. And the longer-term goals of what structures do we need in place to support and ensure ethical and lawful practice. (Female supervisor, USA/Canada)

As we have seen supervisors' responses reflect an inbuilt ethical dilemma in whether to report someone to their professional body or elsewhere – who is the supervisor to do so; what might that do to the trust that has been built up and might be broken; what would justify this; how does it link to their values?

As Iordanou *et al.*, (2017, p. 25) suggest, the role of a professional code is "to provide the catalyst for moral thinking and to function as a quality assurance mechanism." The values of both the supervisor and supervisee are a crucial element in how we respond. Hence Iordanou *et al.*, (2017) underline the importance of the practitioner consciously taking time to explore and reflect on their values and ethics and how they will impact on their work.   However, it is unclear the extent to which this is done in practice through supervision. We saw in Table 4 that in managing conflict between different requirements supervisors the third most popular choice was encouraging their supervisees to refer to their values. However, another finding (Q1) showed that 20.79% of supervisors did not speak about the role of values in ethical decision-making.

Implications for practice

Carroll and Shaw note, there are no easy answers when it comes to ethics and "how incredibly simple and, at times, tempting it is to remain ethically unaware" (2013, p. 351). To achieve ethical awareness there are broad implications to support the continued development of situational and self-awareness and the understanding of the role values play in our practice. These tools include coach and supervisor training, the role of contracting, the professional bodies and the widespread use of reflective practice.

Coach and supervision training

Coach training programmes for coaches and supervisors have grown in length and may vary from a few days to a few years where a Master's level qualification is obtained. While programmes will touch on ethics, most have yet to add ethics as a central, continuous developmental strand; instead the relationship, models and techniques remain the dominant foci. When ethics is taught the discussion can be limited to ethical codes of practice, which may suggest an implication that a clear-cut solution can be identified. Codes are helpful tools to deepen understanding, but they have limitations, given they cannot cover the many diverse situations practitioners face and reflect one perspective, that of professional bodies, on ethics.

Iordanou *et al.* suggest, "the focus…should be cast not on solving ethical issues but, rather on creating those conditions and conversations that will bring them to the surface" (2017, p. 186). Training can create the space to have these ongoing conversations. We believe the continuous use of ethical case studies can support this change, particularly when undertaken within an ethical decision-making framework (Duffy & Passmore, 2010; Turner & Passmore, 2017). We suggest the use of key questions, covering the complexity of dilemmas, to guide the individual in a decision-making investigation. The aim is to develop a general ethical maturity, confidence, and understanding, to make ethics an everyday consideration, as part of developing our internal supervisor (Casement, 1985).

The findings demonstrate differences in how supervisors deal with dilemmas. While a relatively small number, 7.92% of supervisors would not refer to a professional code in making a decision on a tricky dilemma; there was also a lack of clarity around the role of professional insurers and the police.

Respondents referred to this area overtly:

> *I need their trust if we are to work openly and constructively. Hence, I would not seek to report them. However, if the courts subpoena me to provide evidence, then I will comply with the law. I rarely work overtly with values, but the exploration of outcomes does explore the area of values/motivation. I am unaware of any legal obligation to report - but maybe that is a CPD activity for me.* (Male supervisor, UK)

The aim is for coach and supervisor training to help practitioners to better understand themselves, their values and draw on this self-awareness as an effective part of their ethical decision-making. This will support the development of ethical maturity.

Contracting

The importance of contracting has been increasingly documented in literature (including O'Neill, 2000; Ogilvy & Ellam-Dyson, 2012; Rostron, 2013; Cowan, 2013; Lee, 2106). Rostron describes the potential for "conflict of interest between the goals and expectations of the individual being coached, and those of the company, as well as the issues of quality standards and confidentiality" (2016, p. 270). This is picked up by Lee (2016) who advocates contracting as a way of reducing ambiguity in executive coaching and making it more predictable. Turner & Hawkins' research with 569 coaches highlighted the role of contracting in managing dilemmas through being "clear on expectations…boundaries, confidentiality and what coaching is and isn't." (2016, p. 60). This was a view echoed by a participant who talked of the importance of *"the quality, depth and realism of initial contracting with the supervisee"* (Female supervisor, UK). Another described contracting as *"a critical step in setting the foundation for the actions/decisions being considered in this survey"* (Male supervisor, UK).

Contracts, with the individual and/or their organisation (and possibly with an intermediary organization if working as an associate) are among the key resources that individuals turn to when seeking to understand how to navigate through a tricky dilemma. However, as mentioned, they cannot address every eventuality, and further comments reveal the challenge of agreeing who the client is, which itself can create dilemmas. Scoular describes the contractual situation as tricky, and takes a stance that the "real client is not the person sitting in front of you, it's the organization paying the bill" (2011, p. 64):

> *Which contract is primary? Organisation (paying the bill)? Client (Human being with needs and fears)?* (Male supervisor, UK)

> *Remembering who the client is, reviewing the contract, managing boundaries, and being clear and firm.* (Female supervisor, USA/Canada)

While some bodies like the EMCC offer their members 'sample contracts', we believe the wider availability of coaching contracts by professional bodies could help, tailored to different audiences, clients and projects. A clearer understanding of contractual terms would help improve both the frequency with which written contracts are used and the terms of these agreements as a guide to helping resolve some issues. Greater continuing attention could be given during coach and supervisor training.

Professional bodies

Attention to the importance of ethics and ethical decision-making is slowly growing. The largest professional body, the ICF, now requires members going for coach credentialing to undertake an online ethics course and the AC and EMCC require responses to ethical scenarios for accreditation. In 2017 the AC and EMCC established a working group to review the Global Code of Ethics. A further review is exploring the role of ethical guidelines in coaching supervision (led by the AC and the AOCS and including the EMCC and ICF). The EMCC has also launched its own survey into ethics for a planned "EMCC International Provocations Report" (EMCC, 2017). This activity is welcome, and elements may partly reflect a response to the ethical research we have been conducting during 2016-17, which included interviews with chief executives, directors and chairs from the main professional coaching bodies.

Professional bodies could further support the development of ethical awareness with compulsory ethics training, as part of re-registration, not just for credentialing/accreditation. Garvey (2011, p. 23) however, warns of the "consensus view of truth." He talks of professional bodies' motivations, including providing a unifying sense of direction to attract and keep members and the need to establish standards, rules and regulations (2011, p. 22). Such training could feature online elements and multiple-choice testing to confirm understanding of the code and deepen understanding of the complexity of managing ethical dilemmas. However, this would need to be done with caution; professional bodies, which are reliant on generous volunteers, do not have the only view on what is ethical, so would need to draw on a broad range of contributors.

There could also be more widespread use of an ethics "hotline". The ICF make this available, "only for the limited purpose of assisting individuals with inquiries pertaining to the ICF Code of Ethics" (ICF, 2017c). Further hotlines would both raise the profile of ethics, underlining its everyday nature, while also giving practitioners a safe space to raise concerns without judgment provided they are set up appropriately.

One supervisor who took part in this research reflected:

> There has been a need for well over 16 years for all these questions to be asked. I have taken a case to the ICF in the past, and felt that Supervisors and Coaches must have really clear pathways within the Professional Organisations to be able to take all tricky ethical concerns. It is never black and white in the processing of dilemmas unless there is criminality involved. (Female supervisor, UK)

Reflective practice and supervision

While the case for supervision has not been fully made evidentially, in either coaching or therapy, the ability to reflect and learn from experience is widely recognized as a key aspect of personal development (Schon, 1991). Further, writers such as Hawkins (Hawkins & Schwenk, 2006), Bachkirova (Bachkirova, Jackson & Clutterbuck, 2011), de Haan (2012) and Arnold (2014) have highlighted the experiential benefits which practitioners identify from their engagement in supervision.   This research suggests that supervision can provide a place for supporting good decision-making, sitting alongside other forms of reflective practice including writing, journalizing and keeping a diary (Woods, 2011; Patterson, 2013) to help develop the practitioner's internal supervisor which can provide a resource for resolving tricky issues.

Conclusion

This study is the first in a series of three. The second is a qualitative study where 10 of the respondents to this survey, selected at random, have been interviewed using a semi-structured approach. The third involves a survey and interviews with leaders of the coaching professional bodies.

In this first report, we set out to consider what are likely to be tricky dilemmas related to legality and how supervisors deal with them. For most participants in this study, their practice was one of partnership and equality helping individuals work through the dilemma. This is understandable and will work in most situations.

The research highlighted inconsistencies in practice and these have implications for the profession and its reputation in the rare instances where, for example, the law has been broken. One in five coach supervisors did not discuss the role of values in ethical decision-making and 7.92% did not see a Code of Ethics as a factor to consider while a further 24.75% saw codes as a 'possible' factor in ethical decision-making. There is a lack of clarity about supervisors use of professional bodies, professional insurers, the law and contracts. The professional body Codes of Ethics are clear about what to do in cases of offences which fit mandatory reporting. Yet this was not followed in practice, with 18% saying they would not report any act, including those that came under mandatory reporting legislation, to the police, and 23% of supervisors say they would not report these to the professional body. Professional indemnity insurance (not available universally), comes with access to helplines for advice with ethical dilemmas and tricky situations, but coach supervisors would not routinely encourage their supervisees to use them.

As one participant noted:

> *I find this question difficult in terms of reporting a supervisee to a third party, whether the police, a professional body or organization. I think that is interesting in itself - this is not something that has been discussed much within the profession and it would be good to air this area openly* (Female supervisor, UK)

The findings have suggested a lack of clarity and understanding among supervisors around ethical decision-making related to legality and a lack of consistency in the potential application of Codes of Ethics, and legal requirements. There is a need for more inclusion of ethical work in coach and supervisor training alongside regular opportunities for further development, and access to ethical decision-making models and opportunities to use them. There is also a need for increasing involvement by the coaching professional bodies in promoting ethics and ethical decision-making through helplines, discussion, continuous development opportunities and compulsory ethics elements as part of joining or renewing membership, as well as credentialing/accreditation. We would also encourage the involvement of experienced theorists and practitioners in the field of ethics in this work.

To our knowledge there has been limited research in the field of coaching ethics and we would recommend further studies. This research only considers one element within the coaching field, that of the views of supervisor, selected because of their key role in coaching practice and because of their likely involvement in challenging situations. While the findings are significant, as they highlight differences in practice and areas of uncertainty which can be addressed, they are also limited by this choice. To support practice development further research could give a voice to the other people involved in these tricky situations and ethical dilemma such as the supervisee (coach), and the coachee.

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