Business coaching: Research and design strategies

Dr Flip Schutte,
DBL candidate at the Graduate School of Business Leadership,
University of South Africa,
Midrand, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003, South Africa.
Email: pjwschutte@telkomsa.net

Professor Renier Steyn,
Graduate School of Business Leadership,
University of South Africa,
Midrand, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003, South Africa.
Email: steynr@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

Business coaching as an approach to leadership development has entered the field as a force to be reckoned with the past ten to fifteen years. It is, however, also slowly growing as an academic discipline despite the fact that it only has a small number of active researchers. The motivation behind this article is to report on and critically assess the qualitative research projects in business coaching research. A framework has been developed to analyse the information on qualitative methods used in social sciences research. Data on qualitative research and design strategies in business coaching was collected following the systematic literature methodology. The data was synthesised according to the following framework: title and abstract, literature reviews, method, findings and discussion. The article critically analyses the available information to give an overview of the research and design strategies that are used in research articles on business coaching. This article may serve as an induction for young or inexperienced researchers and a tool to improve empirical endeavours in business coaching. The article also presents a way business coaching research could establish itself as an independent and rigorous academic discipline.

Keywords. Business coaching, research methodology, systematic review.

Source: http://businesscoachingprofessionals.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/professional-business-coaching.jpg

Introduction

Business coaching is a young profession (Maritz, Poggenpoel and Myburgh, 2009:74; Theeboom, Beersma and Van Vianes, 2014:3) and a growing industry (Shelly, 2008:52; Stout-Rostron, 2014:38). Academic research on the topic is still in its infancy and the available peer reviewed research on business coaching is very limited, and is not yet autonomous as an academic discipline (April and April, 2007:214; Beets and Goodman, 2012:13; Cilliers, 2005:25). Testimony to this is the fact that the conceptual and operational identity of coaching is also still unclear (Cilliers, 2005:26). Beets and Goodman (2012:13) affirm that there is a need for empirical work in this field, based on the fact that no research has been conducted to ascertain whether or not coaching delivers the intended results described on webpages and in advertisements.

It is clear, then, that there is not an absence of knowledge on coaching, but that this knowledge is practice and context specific. Literature on coaching is mainly found in popular journals and magazines (Cilliers, 2005:23), and popular books, which in most cases are practice driven and not peer reviewed (Anderson, 2007:54; Upton, 2006:56).

Coaching is centred on unlocking a person's potential to maximise his or her own performance (Maltbia, Marsick and Ghosh, 2014:161). A focus on improving performance and the development of skills is the key to an effective coaching relationship. In practice coaching can be applied to a variety of settings, such as motivating staff, delegating, problem solving, relationship issues, teambuilding and staff development (Maltbia et al., 2014: 177).

There are generally two accepted forms of coaching: directive and non-directive. Directive coaching is a form of coaching whereby the coach teaches and provides feedback and advice, while in contrast, non-directive coaching requires the coach to listen, ask questions, explore, probe and allows the coachee to find solutions to problems (Bond and Seneque, 2013:68). In practice, this means that some coaches assert their expertise, whereas other coaches enable individuals to go beyond the boundaries of the coach and in doing so contribute to personalised growth (Lewis-Duarte and Bligh, 2012: 255). Many argue that coaching should focus on what coachees want, what their goals are and how they can achieve it. Coaching, seen this way, is a collaborative relationship which encourages people to know their values and live them while achieving their goals.

Research purpose and objectives

The objective of this research project is to investigate the peer reviewed published research articles on business coaching to explore the way in which research on the subject is being done. The research question is: How is research on business coaching currently being conducted? The aim of this article is to report on and critically analyse how researchers currently working in the field of business coaching are conducting their research, and how and in which format they publish their results. The assumption the authors make is that basic reporting traditions exist, and studying how reporting is done in the field of coaching, will provide information on the maturity level of the discipline.

In the literature review the theory on how to write a qualitative research article is presented. A systematic investigation of published articles on business coaching explores how research is currently being conducted. The findings are compared to the set standards described in the literature review. The findings furthermore endeavour to describe to researchers how research is done and published in the academic field of business coaching, and to what extent it is according to recognised standards.

Literature review

In this article the focus is on the research and design methods and strategies that are used by academics and researchers who are working in the field of business coaching. As will hopefully become evident later, most researchers in the field of business coaching use the qualitative research method. This emphasis on qualitative research is not surprising. Maritz et al. (2009:75) state that in order to achieve the best and informed results pertaining to business coaching, the qualitative method with its explorative, descriptive and contextual approach is the most feasible. The literature review thus focuses on the qualitative research. The focus is on this type of research as it is the dominant research approach in coaching. This focus is thus not a critique on quantitative research, which some believed is the only route to scientifically validated facts (Alasuutari, 2010:139). No, it is based on necessity, as quantitative results are less often found.

During the 1960s and 1970s the social sciences and business management scene was dominated by the use of the quantitative methods, but lately (since the 1990s) a call has been raised in favour of qualitative methods. Already in the 1980s, Morgan and Smircich (1980:492) report a movement towards qualitative research and today qualitative research forms an integral part of social and business management research (Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler, 2008:194; Bell and Bryman, 2007:64; Meyers, 2013:26). Rather than presenting reality as a function of a number, the aim of qualitative methods is to interpret or to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This is achieved through learning about, amongst other things, people's social and material circumstances, experiences, perspectives and histories (Kemparaj and Chavan, 2013:90). The literature review for this study thus focuses on the qualitative research.

Hunt (2011:296) provides a structure for publishing the results of a qualitative research project. This structure is used here as a format to describe how research is reported in the business coaching field. The application of commonly used sections and headings makes it easier for readers to know where to find the relevant content and also provides a sense of coherence and consistency from study to study (Hunt, 2011:300). This is said with full cognisance that qualitative research is an approach rather than a set of techniques, and its appropriateness derives from the nature of the phenomena that are explored (Morgan and Smircich, 1980:491).

In broad terms the structure of a qualitative paper, as proposed by Hunt (2011:296), is the same as that of a quantitative paper, consisting of the title and abstract, literature review, method, findings and discussion, and

this structure is also used in the literature review. With regard to content, however, qualitative research reporting differs from quantitative research. This is discussed in depth below:

a. Title and abstract

Hunt (2011:296) maintains that the title of a qualitative article should acknowledge the fact that it is based on the qualitative research approach. This should alert the reader to the research approach followed in the investigation. Hunt maintains that the abstract of the qualitative research study should, as in the case of all other abstracts, provide a brief but informative summary that will encourage the reader to continue reading. It should also include general information about the study, including the research question, the fact that a qualitative approach was used, a number of informants, what kind of activities the informants were engaged in, and an overview of the themes and categories generated. Pertinent to what Hunt (2011:296) proposes, is to declare that a qualitative approach was used, and specifically reporting on the themes and categories which emerged.

b. The literature review

In the literature review, as is the case with most articles, researchers should demonstrate that they have done a comprehensive and rigorous overview of theory and existing research (Hunt, 2011:297). This includes background reading on the matter and demonstrates an understanding of current knowledge on the phenomenon (Kemparaj and Chavan, 2013:91). By doing this, researchers should be able to position their own research with reference to the existing body of knowledge (Hunt, 2011:297).

The literature review is further instrumental in refining the research question and the approach that will be followed in conducting the research (De Vos et al., 2013:140). Given the existing research and theory regarding the phenomena, the literature review should justify the need for the study (Hunt, 2011:297), resolve controversy, establish the need for additional research and define a topic of inquiry. It should also exemplify the significance of the study (Kemparaj and Chavan, 2013:92).

Kemparaj and Chavan (2013:92) place a particular burden on qualitative researchers and recommend that qualitative researchers must understand multiple ways of viewing the phenomenon. Hunt (2011:297) therefore urges researchers doing qualitative inquiry to explain why this method is the most appropriate to address the research question. This emphasis on explaining the use of specific research methods as part of the literature review section seems to be unique to qualitative research articles.

c. Method

The methodology section should provide a clear and comprehensive overview of how the investigation will develop and how it will be conducted (Hunt, 2011:297).

Qualitative researchers present their work in a unique manner. They normally begin with a general statement on the topic or field that they want to investigate and then focus on an aspect that is poorly understood and about which little is known. They therefore do not develop hypotheses or pose refined research questions at the outset (Kemparaj and Chavan, 2013:92).

In qualitative research the researcher is an integral part of the research process. Information about the researcher and about the role and potential influence that he or she has in the study design and data analysis should be presented (Silverman, 2013:68). It is important that researchers describe their role, assumptions, potential biases, and how they address these throughout the study (Hunt, 2011:297). Because the researcher is the main data collection instrument in qualitative research, he or she must take steps to ensure the trustworthiness of the data while in the field (Kemparaj and Chavan, 2013:92). The central feature of these efforts is to confirm that the findings accurately reflect the experiences and viewpoints of the participants, rather than the researchers' perception. This section therefore also explains the steps taken to therefore ensure the trustworthiness, credibility, validity and rigour (Hunt, 2011:297).

As with most reports, the method section should also include an account of how the participants were selected, a description of the participants, and what they were asked to do. The mode of data collection should also be discussed (Hunt, 2011:298), as well as the analysis of the data, of which content and discourse analysis is the most popular in qualitative research (Babbie and Mouton, 2012:499).

Types of qualitative research design

The various designs used by qualitative researchers will differ depending on the purpose of the study, the nature of the research question and the skills and resources available to the researcher. Although many valuable designs exist, De Vos et al. (2013:313) regard the following five as the most important ways in qualitative research:

- Narrative biography. This form of research is based on the assumption that the life of a person and the world around us can best be understood through personal accounts and perspectives, and this approach results in various forms of life stories, life histories, narratives, autobiographies and auto-ethnographies (Babbie and Mouton, 2012:73). In the narrative biography the researcher uses the facts to construct and present the essence of the object or person being studied.

- Ethnography. This is a form of anthropological studies based on observations made of (naturally occurring) cultural or social behaviour (De Vos et al., 2013:314). The research process cannot always be planned and is situational, coincidental and individual. The success of this type of research depends on the researcher's skill in transforming the situation into a strategy which includes as many options for data collection as can be imagined and are justifiable.

- Phenomenology. At the root of phenomenology is the intent to understand the phenomena under investigation on their own terms and to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the subjects, thereby allowing the essence to emerge. It is thus an attempt to penetrate illusion in order to get at the reality underlying that illusion (Higgs and Smith, 2006:56). These researchers are thus interested in collecting data by direct involvement

through interpreting social interactions in a process to search for meaning.

- Grounded theory. The aim of grounded theory is to develop a substantive theory that is grounded in data. It employs techniques of induction, deduction and verification or validation. It compares theory and data to look for similarities and differences in the data. This process enables the researcher to identify underlying uniformities and produce categories or concepts in order to generate theory (Wolfswinkel, Furtmueller and Wilderom, 2013:46).

- Case study. The strategic value of a case study lies in its ability to draw attention to what can be learned from a single case. It allows new ideas and hypotheses to merge from careful and detailed observations (Terre Blanche et al., 2009:460). The researcher situates the case within a larger context, but the focus remains on either the case or an issue that is illustrated by the case. Different case studies can also be compared to one another to make certain deductions.

These are the standard ways of conducting qualitative research and it could be expected of researchers on business coaching to report using some of these approaches.

Method of data gathering

The collection of data is not only an important concept to take into consideration when designing a qualitative research project, it is also important to decide which data collection method should be employed because it can have a decisive impact on the results of the investigation.

The most frequently used data collection methods in qualitative research (De Vos et al., 2013:325) are discussed below:

- Interviews. Interviews to collect data can be conducted with individuals or with groups (Terre Blanche et al., 2009:297). It is better to have an open interview which allows the objects of the study to speak for themselves rather than providing the respondents with a battery of predetermined hypothesis-based questions (Babbie and Mouton, 2012:249). Interviewing a participant involves not only the description of the experience, but also a reflection on the description (De Vos et al., 2013:342).

- Observations. Studying the phenomena in a naturalistic way while the action is taking place is called observation (Terre Blanche et al., 2009:310). The researcher has to take notes and record what happens while it is happening. The two different types of observation are *simple observation* - where the researcher remains an outside observer - or *participant observation* - where the researcher is simultaneously a member of the group that is being studied and the researcher doing the study (Babbie and Mouton, 2012:300).

- Questionnaires. Though the term questionnaire suggests a list of questions, the typical questionnaire will probably reveal as many statements as questions. This is because the

researcher is interested in determining the extent to which respondents hold a particular attitude or perspective. Respondents can thus react to statements by either agreeing or disagreeing. Both questions and statements can be used profitably in a questionnaire (Babbie and Mouton, 2012:249). Researchers can ask either open-ended or closed-ended questions. In qualitative research the open-ended questions are used more often.

- Documentary sources. Documentary sources such as letters, newspaper articles, official documents and books or diaries can be useful in qualitative research. Sometimes these source are easier to use than interviews or observations because they can be more extensive and a more unbiased form of data collection (Terre Blanche et al., 2009:316). Babbie and Mouton (2012:303) add to this list of personal documents photos, memos, biographies and graffiti.

In most cases the data collected in qualitative studies are presented as script, namely interview remarks and observation notes, written answers to open-ended questions and newspaper articles.

Data integrity

In quantitative research one can rely on tried and tested assessment instruments to collect data and on proven statistical techniques to analyse the data (Terre Blanche et al., 2009:51). In qualitative research, which is interpretative in nature, it is the researcher who is the primary instrument for both collecting and analysing the data (Babbie and Mouton, 2012:489).

To protect the integrity of the interpreted data and of the data collection process of the qualitative researcher, different methods have been introduced. These methods relate to the trust one can put in the findings of the research, and the credibility and authenticity of the data (De Vos et al., 2013:421). Some refer to this as the trustworthiness of the data.

Procedures to establish trustworthiness include prolonged interaction with participants (having consecutive interviews with the same participants), using peer debriefers, thoroughly describing where and how the data were generated, and establishing an audit trail (Hunt, 2011:298). Babbie and Mouton (2012:299) also suggest the following procedures: persistent observations, referential adequacy and member checks which imply that the researchers go back to the source of the information and check both the data and the interpretation. All these are done to ensure that the scientific community finds the results of the research study credible.

A technique used to confirm the trustworthiness of the data collection process is called triangulation (Frost, 2011:78). Triangulation or the use of multiple methods entails collecting material in as many different ways and from as many diverse sources as possible (Terre Blanche et al., 2009:287). Triangulation is generally considered to be one of the best ways to enhance validity and reliability in qualitative research (Babbie and Mouton, 2012:275).

Other techniques to ensure the integrity of the data are purposive sampling and thick descriptions. According to Babbie and Mouton (2012:101), these contribute to the extent in which the findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents, thus making them transferable. To demonstrate the dependability of data, an inquiry must also provide its audience with evidence that if the research methods were repeated with the same or similar respondents in the same or a similar context, their findings would be similar. Some refer to this as conformability (De Vos et al., 2013:442). Put differently, conformability is the degree in which the findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not the biases of the researcher (Babbie and Mouton, 2012:276).

This research study will thus identify which techniques researchers in the field of business coaching use to ensure the integrity of the data of their research, and to what extent these techniques comply with standard practice.

Sampling

Sampling is the selection of research material from an entire body of data (Babbie and Mouton, 2012:164). Qualitative researchers usually employ probability sampling because a random sample is not the best method for the selection of data (Kemparaj and Chavan, 2013:92). Sampling size in qualitative research depends on what the researches need to know and the type of study (De Vos et al., 2013:224). A very small random sample may be unrepresentative, and the same is true for a large non-random sample. The researcher must ensure that the sample is large enough to allow him or her to thus make inferences about the population (Terre Blanche et al., 2009:134).

The techniques used for sampling must suit the particular research study and the researcher must be able to justify why a certain technique or strategy has been selected. De Vos et al. (2013:224) list the following sampling techniques as applicable to qualitative research: purposive sampling, theoretical sampling, deviant case sampling, sequential sampling, snowball sampling, key informant sampling, and volunteer sampling. Whatever sampling techniques are selected, it is important to select an information-rich sample because the researcher can learn a great deal about issues that are crucial to the purpose of the research (Glesne, 2011:94).

Data analysis

Qualitative researchers approach data analysis in different ways. In the linguistic tradition the focus is on words and conversations, whereas in the sociological traditions the focus is more on thematic analysis (Glesne, 2011:95). This analysis can also then be either deductive or inductive. Deductive reasoning moves from the general to the specific; in other words, it moves from a pattern that might be logically or theoretically expected to observations that test whether the expected pattern actually occurs. Inductive reasoning, on the other hand, moves from the particular to the general. Inductive reasoning thus begins not with a pre-established truth or assumption, but with an observation, moving from concrete observations to a general theoretical explanation (De Vos et al., 2013:319).

d. Findings

The findings or results are the culmination of the study. The researcher should present findings in a clear, logical and concise manner, so that readers can interpret for themselves how the participants made meaning of the specific phenomenon. It is not enough to present the themes as headings, with no definition or description of the theme, and then provide a series of quotes. The themes must be described in detail, using direct quotes from participants to add richness and depth to the findings (Hunt, 2011:299).

Qualitative reports are generally filled with rich verbatim passages directly from the study participants. The researcher needs to connect the themes to one another and to the research question. The findings must provide a synthesis of the obtained data which are grouped or categorised according to some organising or analysis principle. Tables, models, diagrams and figures may be used to indicate key components of the findings (Kamparaj and Chavan, 2013:97).

e. Discussion

The discussion summarises the findings, relates them to the research question and describes how the findings connect to each other. The strengths, limitations and weaknesses of the research must also be outlined in this section. Recommendations for future research can also be presented. The discussion should end with a section on the implications of the findings of the topic or research question (Hunt, 2011:299) as well as the limitations that were experienced during the study, and the contribution that was made by the study.

Research design

The methodology of the research is directly linked to the aim of this article, namely to provide a systematic and qualitative review of research and design strategies and methodologies used in the research of business coaching. Systematic reviews are designed to reduce bias in reporting on literature (White and Schmidt, 2005:56). The methodology of systematic literature reviews aims to minimise the effect of the selection of sources, publications and type of data collected (Nightingale, 2009:381). The methodology includes a summary and critique of the findings from systematic methods through the processes by which the individual studies are integrated (Green et al., 2006:103).

The researcher conducted a systematic investigation of published peer-reviewed literature on business coaching. The research process generally consists of three parts, namely to collect, analyse and synthesise the data. In this study the researcher conducted a critical analysis of the work of recently published authors in order to explore and describe the way in which research is done and results are presented in business coaching literature. This was done to assess the trends or the most commonly used method in standard practice.

Research method

The investigation distinguishes between research done according to qualitative and quantitative methods. As most reports found are qualitative in nature, and as discussing qualitative and quantitative research in one article may be too cumbersome, the method that is used most often will be identified and the articles using that specific method are further analysed.

The analytical tools function as a lens to interrogate the available literature. These tools can be developed before or during engagement with the literature (Terre Blanche et al., 2009:321). In this study the tools were developed beforehand, given the broad guidelines presented by (Hunt, 2011:296), and are presented below:

- Title and abstracts. Article titles were investigated to see if the words "research" or "qualitative research" appeared in them, as Hunt (2011:296) suggested for qualitative articles. The abstracts were studied to identify the following: if a definite research question is posed, if a qualitative approach is explicitly mentioned, if the number of participants engaged is reported, if clear descriptions are provided of what kind of activities the participants were engaged in, and if the authors explicitly provide a list of the themes and categories generated.
- Literature reviews. The analysis of literature reviews only focuses on the elements which are unique to qualitative research. As such the focus is on current theoretical themes (given that the research is not inductive), the researcher's reason for considering the phenomenon relevant, and why qualitative inquiry is the most appropriate to address the research question. The theoretical themes that are investigated in the literature review are identified in each article, as well as the researcher's motivation for this phenomenon's relevance and why qualitative inquiry is

considered the most appropriate to address the research question. The theoretical themes addressed in the literature review are identified by the different headings presented in the literature review.

- Method. Under this heading the following information is reported on: the types of research design used, the method of data gathering, evidence of reporting on trustworthiness; sampling, and data analysis strategies. The articles were thus also studied to see if the researcher explained how he or she protects the integrity of the data and if they applied any method to ensure trustworthiness.
- Findings. The findings were scrutinised to identify if findings related to the research question were explicitly listed. The format in which findings were reported was also investigated.
- Discussion. The discussion section was studied to determine if the implications of the findings for the topic or research question were mentioned. It was also analysed to see whether it was data driven.

Because of the nature of this research project, the researcher was expected to read the articles, collect, list and synthesise the data, and to present the findings. There were no interviews or questionnaires, or any other methods of data collection involved. In this research study all the articles that could be found through the specified search engines of the UNISA library have been selected as the population on articles to be assessed.

Data collection methods

The structure described by Kable et al. (2012:879) is used as an outline for this literature review, focusing on the research and design methodology in peer reviewed published articles on business coaching. Broad bouquets of Ebsco Host and Emerald Insight data bases were used as they have a wide reach. This was complimented by a Google and Google Scholar search to identify other articles, relevant documents and published reports from conferences or seminar programmes. Nightingale (2009:382) suggests that such an addition improves the sensitivity of the search. The search was limited to an electronic exploration of English articles published in the past 20 years. Attention was given to the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the search (White and Schmidt, 2005:56). Only information or data that are accepted by the scientific community should be included in building the body of knowledge (Babbie and Mouton, 2012:43), and as such, only published peer reviewed articles were considered. All articles of which the full text was not available were excluded, as were articles written in an informal style, or articles appearing in non-academic publications such as magazines. These types of data were excluded.

Three concepts were used to search the databases, with a focus not only on the title of documents but also the content. The searched terms were *qualitative research, quantitative research* and *business coaching*. The search was conducted in late September 2014. Each of the articles retrieved was assessed for relevance by reading the abstract, and where necessary, the entire paper. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to exclude those papers that are not relevant to this review. Articles that met the criteria were selected and documented, and duplicates were excluded. The results of the search were reported as the number of articles which met the inclusion criteria, as well as the number of cases left remaining after the introduction of the exclusion criteria. The quality of the articles was not appraised again. All articles in peer reviewed journals were included, based on the fact that they had been peer reviewed. Once included, the articles were deemed sufficient. An annexure with a list of the articles investigated is attached (Annexure A). The articles are numbered. In the results section the findings will be recorded by referring to the article number.

Findings

The search delivered 84 articles on the topic of business coaching of which 42 were peer reviewed. Of the 42, six were promotional articles, leaving the researcher with 36 articles that were suitable for further investigation. Of the 36, only 16 were empirically researched articles and 14 indicated that they had used the qualitative research method (see Annexure A). Only two articles used a combination of the qualitative and quantitative research methods. An important finding is that research on business coaching is mainly qualitative in nature. For this reason, only the findings of the 14 articles using the qualitative research method exclusively were investigated.

a. Findings pertaining to title and abstracts

Findings meeting the set requirements pertaining to the title will be presented firstly.

Title

Not one article mentioned the words research or qualitative research in the title of the article. According to Hunt (2011:296), all articles are supposed to include these words in order to identify it as a research article.

Abstract

All 14 articles have a research question posed in the abstract. Only five articles (Articles 4, 7, 9, 11 and 14) mentioned in the abstract that the qualitative approach was employed. Eleven articles (Articles 1, 2, 4; 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 14) mentioned the number of participants in the abstract. The number of participants varies as follows: 6, 7, 10, 25, 30, 39, 59, 73, 80 and 110.

Only 11 articles mentioned in the abstract the activities that the participants were engaged in. Four used questionnaires (Articles 2, 4, 5 and 6). In two articles researchers made use of interviews (Articles 7 and 9). One article (Article 14) presented coaching programmes to the participants and assessed them afterwards. One article (Article 13) made use of an online survey. One article (Article 15) had a one-day focus group. One researcher (Article 1) asked the participants to write essays, and one article (Article 12) used both a questionnaire and an interview.

Nine articles (Articles 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 15 and 16) contain a list of themes in the abstract. The theme "business coaching" occurred eight times and "leadership", four times. The following occurred twice: "executive coaching", "senior management" and "management development" three times; "coaching relationship" and "self-efficacy" two times, and the rest

of the themes only occurred once: evaluation; business benefits; middle management; recruitment; difficult emotions; gender; supervision; coaching psychology; high potential development schemes; talent management; return on investment; skills transfer; strengths coaching; trust; transparency; sales force; attitudes; behaviour; outcomes; organisational change; organisational development; and characteristics of coaching.

b. Findings pertaining to literature reviews

In two articles (Articles 5 and 6) no literature review was done. Only the results of the research are listed.

The following themes were used as headings in the literature review of the remaining twelve articles: Efficacy of executive coaching; paradigms in studying executive coaching; the Integrated Executive Experiential Learning Coaching model; systems psychodynamic perspective; confidence in the coaching relationship; holistic evaluation model; coaching goals; influence of buy-in on coaching effectiveness; evaluating coaching effectiveness; leadership competencies gained from coaching; place of emotion in workplace; defining difficult emotions; therapeutic relationship; counselling; psychotherapy; coaching and commitment; intrinsic motivation; role ambiguity; job satisfaction; satisfaction with supervisor; management development; business coaching; psychological principles; executive coaching; working alliance; self-efficacy; HR Management in African context; identity of conflicts; values in conflicts; executive coaching; influence tactics; diversity; organisational role analysis; defining coaching as a form of organisational intervention;

development of executive coaching as a management development tool; effectiveness indicators, and the characteristics of the person being coached.

The authors of only seven articles (Articles 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, 14 and 15) explain why they used the qualitative inquiry method and why it is considered the most appropriate to address the research question. The reasons given are as follows: three researchers (Articles 7, 11 and 14) describe the advantages of rich descriptions for qualitative research. Article 2 indicates that the qualitative method was used because of the inductive/deductive approach and the principle of revisiting of the data to build hypotheses. Article 4 motivates the use of the qualitative method by explaining that with the grounded theory approach perspectives, theories and strategies can be explored and themes can be elicited. Article 9 uses the qualitative method because it helps to discover uncommon themes and because the method is explorative, descriptive and contextual as well as interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary and counter-disciplinary. Article 15 regards the greatest advantage of the qualitative method the fact that the researcher can gather data from various sources through interviews and literature.

c. Findings pertaining to method

The types of research design

The articles investigated listed the following as types of design: five articles (Articles 1, 2, 4, 7 and 15) used grounded theory Articles 9 and 11 used a focus group interview with open-ended questions and article 14 used case studies. Article 16 used a coaching intervention session with pre and post coaching assessments.

The method of data gathering

The following methods were listed: Eight articles indicate that they used questionnaires (Articles 2, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13 and 16); four used interviews (Articles 7, 9, 11 and 12); two (Articles 14 and 16) used coaching sessions as a method to gather data.

Trustworthiness

Five articles (Articles 1, 9, 11, 12 and 15) elucidate how the researchers achieved trustworthiness. The findings of Article 1 were examined by a psychologist to whom the research method and interpretive stance were well known. Article 9 used triangulation, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing and member checking. Article 11 also used triangulation, and as an additional check, it reviewed secondary literature. Article 12 indicated that the researchers made transcriptions of the telephone interviews for future reference and validation, and the validity was protected because no generalisations were made from the data. According to Article 15, the researcher read the results back to the group members to validate the data.

Sampling

Most of the articles merely indicate how many participants were parts of the investigation. These numbers are the same as those mentioned in the abstract, namely between six and a hundred and ten. As far as the technique is concerned, Article 9 referred to snowball sampling. The rest made use of what they called volunteer sampling.

Data analysis

The following were mentioned regarding the data analysis: three article (Articles 9, 10 and 13) indicate that they used an open inductive

approach and descriptive analysis; two articles (Articles 1 and 11) used content analysis which entails breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising; two articles (Articles 4 and 7) used grounded theory as a form of phenomenological inquiry. The rest of the articles include the following: main themes are identified (Article 2), and analysis of questionnaires (Article 5), the questionnaires gave the statistics and through the interviews, themes were identified (Article 12); discourse analysis (Article 14); analyse data and map themes into meta-categories (Article 15); pre-coaching and post-coaching scores were compared on standard questions (Article 16).

d. Findings pertaining to findings

All fourteen articles present their findings in such a way that they answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the articles. Eight articles (Articles 2, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 15 and 16) use tables as an aid to make the findings more accessible. Three articles (Articles 7, 12 and 16) use figures and one article (Article 2) uses a graph. Five articles (Articles 1, 4, 7, 14 and 15) report their results according to the themes that were discovered during the research. Article 2 lists the findings numerically while Article 5 makes a summary of the answers given on each question in the questionnaire. Article 10 gives exploratory notes with the tables in which the findings are summarised. Most of the articles (Articles 1, 4, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16) use the essay style to report their results.

e. Findings pertaining to discussion

Two articles (Articles 4 and 15) do not present a discussion section. The other twelve articles contain discussion sections in which they identify the implications of their findings for the topic that they researched. Eight articles (Articles 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 16) list the limitations that they experienced during the research. Eleven articles (Articles 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16) comment that further research must be done.

Discussion

A total of 84 articles were located by means of the search strategy and 14 were analysed according to the stated inclusion and exclusion criteria. All 14 articles had been published in the last nine years. The result of this search emphasises the notion that only a limited body of research on coaching is available. The research question for this study is: How is research currently being done on the topic of business coaching? The discussion that follows interprets the findings to answer this question.

Although Hunt (2011:296) suggests that the title must at least acknowledge that the article is based on qualitative research, none of the articles had the words "research" or "qualitative" in.

Different journals have different criteria for the abstract section of an article. In general the abstract provides the requisite information to introduce the reader to the content of the article. In this investigation all fourteen articles state the research question. Eleven mention the number of participants and the activities that they were involved in and nine articles give a keyword or theme list. Only five articles indicate in the abstract that they used the qualitative research approach. From this information it can be concluded that one can expect the research question in the abstract, the number of participants, the activities

that they were engaged in, and a keyword or theme list.

The literature reviews present background for understanding the current knowledge on the different topics. They also illuminate the need for the new study that this researcher undertook. In addition, it supplies a summary of the existing literature which helps the researcher towards a greater grounding of his or her own research in the existing literature and contributes to the growth of the body of knowledge. Two of the articles do not present a literature review but only list the findings of their research. The other twelve articles have literature reviews covering theoretical themes under different headings. Seven articles motivated why they used the qualitative research approach. The common denominator is the fact that the qualitative inquiry is the most suitable because of the advantage of the rich descriptions that it offers.

The method section of the articles describes how the researchers developed and conducted their studies. All fourteen articles describe the type of research design they used; most researchers used the grounded theory approach. Eight researchers used questionnaires as a method of data collection, four used interviews and two used coaching sessions. Only five researchers indicated how they went about to ensure the trustworthiness of their research and results.

No consistency could be found in the sampling. The number of participants varied from six to 110. Nine of the fourteen research studies employed a number of participants below 80. The data analysis also varies from study to study. Methods such as descriptive analysis, content analysis, grounded theory, theme identification, discourse analysis and interpretation of the answers given on the questionnaires were most commonly used.

Outline the results

In conclusion, it appears that the grounded theory approach was used more frequently than any other approach, and that questionnaires are the most popular method for collecting data. Most researchers do not explain how they ensure the trustworthiness of their research. There seems to be no norm for a sampling size. Findings are presented by all fourteen articles. Reporting by means of an essay seems to be the most common. The findings are in some cases enriched by tables, figures and graphs. Twelve articles present discussion sections which list the implications of the findings of the research study. Eight researchers list limitations that they experienced during their research, and eleven researchers recommend that further research must be done in their field of research. They also recommend topics for further research.

Practical implications

This study discusses the strategies and methods that are currently being used by researchers on business coaching. This may inform prospective researchers on what the most popular strategies are and also guide established researchers to select the most appropriate strategies to broaden the body of knowledge on business coaching. The research study makes it clear that business coaching is ill developed as an academic discipline.

Limitations and recommendations

One of the limitations of this research study is the fact that there were only 16 research articles available to scrutinize for data, of which only 14 were explored because they used only

the qualitative research method. This limitation, however, immediately becomes a recommendation as researchers in the field of business coaching must be motivated to publish more research articles. Researchers must also, as far as possible, adhere to the recommended reporting and publishing style to present their findings. This will make their research results more user friendly and accessible to other researchers.

Conclusion

Hunt (2011:296) provides a structure for publishing the results of a qualitative research study. This structure was used as the format for writing this article. The structure was also used as a lens to interrogate the available literature on business coaching in order to identify how research on business coaching is currently being done. The research made it clear that Hunt's structure is very popular and has been commonly used in the available literature. Commonly used sections and headings make it easier for readers to know where to find the relevant content. Hunt's structure also provides a sense of coherence and consistency from study to study. The presentation format suggested by Hunt (2011:296) includes title and abstract, literature review; method, findings and discussion.

When conducting research for this article, the following came to light and can serve as a conclusion: The title of the article should include the type of research used. Not one of the articles investigated mentioned the type of research in the title. No consistency could be found in the titles. The abstract provides information such as the research question, the number of participants and the activities that they were engaged in.

The literature review section covers theoretical themes under different headings, motivating the research approach, and grounding the researcher's own research in the existing literature.

The methods used by the qualitative researchers are most often the grounded theory approach and researchers mostly collect their data by using questionnaires. The grounded theory is a research tool which enables one to seek out and conceptualise the latent social patterns and structures of a researchers' area of interest through the process of constant comparison. The researchers then analyse the data and do a content analysis of the answers to identify themes. The sample size is normally fewer than 80 participants and it is not a general rule that researchers explain the trustworthiness of their research and results.

The finding section is a *sine qua non* and results are presented in detail. The discussion section presents the implications of the findings for the research question and lists the limitations that the researcher experienced during the research. It also recommends topics for further research.

It is thus concluded that the structure used for qualitative research in business coaching is a commonly used structure and accepted as a norm for doing research by academics and researchers in the field of business coaching. Most revealing in this study, however, is the lack of reports on business coaching in the academic domain.

References

Alasuutari, P. (2010). The rise and relevance of qualitative research. **International Journal of Social Research Methodology**, 13(2): 139-155.

Anderson, B. (2007). Executive coaching: soft of hardcore? **Finweek**, 2 August, 56.

Anderson, V. (2009). **Research in human resource management**. 2nd ed. London: Charted Institute of Personnel and Development.

April, K. A., & April, A. R. (2007). Growing leaders in emergent markets: Leadership enhancement in the new South Africa. **Journal of Management Education**, 31(2): 214-244.

Averweg, U. R. (2010). Enabling role of an intranet to augment e-coaching. **Industrial and Commercial Training**, 42(1): 47-52.

Babbie, E., & Mouton, J. (2012). **The practice of social research**. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Beets, K., & Goodman, S. (2012). Evaluating a training programme for executive coaches. **Journal of Human Resource Management**, 10(3): 12-22.

Bell, E & Bryman, A. (2007). The ethics of management research: an exploratory content analysis. **British Journal of Management**, 18(1): 63-77.

Blumberg, B, Cooper D.R., & Schindler, P.S. (2008). **Quantitative and qualitative research: Business research methods**. Maidenhead: McGrawHill.

Bond, C. & Seneque, M. (2013). Conceptualizing coaching as an approach to management and organizational development. **Journal of Management Development**, 32(1): 57-72.

Cilliers, F.V.N. (2005). Executive coaching experiences: a systems psychodynamic perspective. **SA Journal of Industrial Psychology**, 31(3): 23-30.

De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B., & Delport, C.S. L. (2013). **Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human services professions**. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Frost, N. (2011). **Qualitative research methods in Psychology: Combining core approaches**. New York, NY: Open University Press.

Glesne, C. (2011). **Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction**. 4th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Green, B.N., Johnson, C.D., & Adams, A. (2006). Writing narrative literature reviews for peer-reviewed journals: Secrets of the trade. **Journal of Chiropractic Medicine**, 5(3): 102-117.

Higgs, P., & Smith, J. (2006). **Rethinking truth**. 2nd ed. Cape Town: Juta.

Hunt, B. (2011). Publishing qualitative research in counselling journals. **Journal of Counseling & Development**, 89(3): 296-300.

Kable, A. K., Pich, J., & Maslin-Prothero, S. E. (2012). A structured approach to documenting a search strategy for publication: A 12 step guideline for authors. **Nurse Education Today**, 32: 878-886.

Kemparaj, U., & Chavan, S. (2013). Qualitative research: A brief description. **Indian Journal of Medical Sciences**, 67(3/4): 89-98.

Lewis-Duarte, M. & Bligh, M.C. (2012). Agents of "influence": exploring the usage, timing, and outcomes of executive coaching tactics. **Leadership & Organizational Development Journal**, 33(3): 255-281.

Maltbia, T.E., Marsick, V.J, & Ghosh, R. (2014). Executive and organizational coaching: A review of insights drawn from literature to inform HRD practice. **Advances in Developing Human Resources**, 16(2): 161-183.

Maritz, J. E., Poggenpoel, M., & Myburgh, C. P.H. (2009). Core competencies necessary for a managerial psycho-educational training programme for business team coaches: original research. SA Journal of Human Resource Management, 7(1): 1-8.

Meyers, M.D. (2013). **Qualitative Research in Business and Management**. London: Sage.

Morgan, G., & Smircich, L. (1980). The case for qualitative research. **Academy of Management Review**, 5(4): 491-500.

Nightingale, A. (2009). A guide to systematic literature reviews. **Surgery**, 27(9): 381-384.

Shelly, M. (2008). Coaching in Construction. **Magazine of the South African Institution of Civil Engineering**, 16(10): 52-53.

Silverman, D. (2013). **Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook**. London: Sage.

Stout-Rostron, S. (2014). **Business coaching international: Transforming individuals and organizations**. London: Karnac Books.

Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K., & Painter, D. (2009). **Research in practice: Applied methods for the Social Sciences**. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Theeboom, T., Beersman, B. & Van Vianen, A.E.M. (2014). Does coaching work? A meta-analysis on the effects of coaching on individual level outcomes in an organizational context. **The Journal of Positive Psychology**, 9(1), 1-18.

Upton, P. (2006. Sport can learn from business. **Finweek**, 10 August, 48-49.

White, A., & Schmidt, K. (2005). Systematic literature reviews. **Complementary Therapies in Medicine**, 13: 54-60.

Wolfswinkel, J.F., Furtmueller, E., & Wilderom, C.P.M. (2013). Using grounded theory as a method for rigorously reviewing literature. **European Journal of Information Systems**, 22: 45-55.

ANNEXURE A

Chronological list of articles and article numbers used in the review

1 Cilliers, F.V.N. (2005). Executive coaching experiences: a systems psychodynamic perspective. **SA Journal of Industrial Psychology**, 31(3): 23-30.

2 Leedham, M. (2005). The Coaching Scorecard: a holistic approach to evaluating the benefits of business coaching. **International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring**, 3(2): 30-45.

3 Bowles, S., Cunningham, C.J.L., De La Rosa, G.M., & Picano, J. (2007). Coaching leaders in middle and executive management: goals, performance, buy-in. **Leadership and Organization Development Journal**, 28(5): 388-408.

4 Cox, E., & Bachkirova, T. (2007). Coaching with emotion: How coaches deal with difficult emotional situations. **International Coaching Psychology Review**, 2(2): 178-190.

5 Feggetter, A.J.W. (2007). A preliminary evaluation of executive coaching: Does executive coaching work for candidates on a high potential development scheme? **International Coaching Psychology Review**, 2(2): 129-142.

6 Govindji, R. & Linley, P.A. (2007). Strengths use, self-concordance and well-being: Implications for strengths coaching and coaching psychologists. **International Coaching Psychology Review**, 2(2): 143-154.

7 Gyllensten, K. & Palmer, S. (2007). The coaching relationship: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. **International Coaching Psychology Review**, 2(2):168-177.

8 Onyemah, V. (2009). The effects of coaching on salespeople's attitudes and behaviors: A contingency approach. **European Journal of Marketing**, 43(7/8): 938-960.

9 Maritz, J. E., Poggenpoel, M. & Myburgh, C.P.H. (2009). Core competencies necessary for a managerial psycho-educational training programme for business team coaches: original research. **SA Journal of Human Resource Management**, 7(1): 1-8.

10 Baron, L., Morin, L., & Morin, D. (2011). Executive coaching: The effect of working alliance discrepancy on the development of coachees' self-efficacy. **Journal of Management Development**, 30(9): 847-864.

11 Mayer, C., & Louw, L. (2011). Managerial challenges in South Africa. **European Business Review**, 23(6): 572-591.

12 Beets, K., & Goodman, S. (2012). Evaluating a training programme for executive coaches. **Journal of Human Resource Management**, 10(3): 12-22.

13 Lewis-Duarte, M., & Bligh, M. C. (2012). Agents of "influence": exploring the usage, timing, and outcomes of executive coaching tactics. **Leadership and Organization Development Journal**, 33(3): 255 – 281.

14 Motsoaledi, L., & Cilliers, F. (2012). Executive coaching in diversity from the systems psychodynamic perspective. **SA Journal for Industrial Psychology**, 38(2): 32-43.

15 Bond, C., & Seneque, M. (2013). Conceptualizing coaching as an approach to management and organizational development. **Journal of Management Development**, 32(1): 57-72.

16 Bozer, G., Sarros, J.C, & Santora, J.C. (2013). The role of coachee characteristics in executive coaching for effective sustainability. **Journal of Management Development**, 32(3): 277-294.