

Quarterly Reflections on Team Coaching

April – June 2025

An evidence-based approach to working with teams



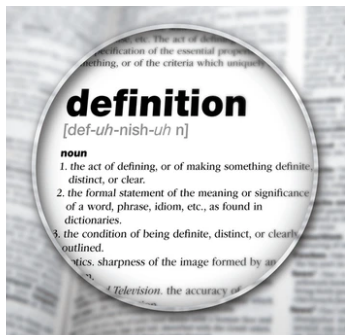
Introduction

Team coaching has become very popular, with lots of books and training programs now available, but as a discipline it is still very newⁱ. When new disciplines take-off in the way that the interest in team coaching has burgeoned, then we see a rush to define the term, to establish boundaries around the new practice, to decide what constitutes best practice, and to come up with standard competencies for practitioners. We are seeing all of this happening now in the world of team coaching. The three biggest industry associations; the ICF, EMCC and AC all launched their first attempt at defining team coaching competencies within the last five years. This rush to align around a single perspective on team coaching is understandable, and in many ways helpful, but can also be confusing. Many of the books and articles on team coaching contain contradictory advice, some of which is based on rigorous study, some of which is not. In this paper we illustrate some of the diversity of thought in the team coaching space, and propose a structure through which we might all navigate the next steps in the evolution of team coaching.

Debate

Here are just a few of the areas where people currently think differently about team coaching.

What *is* team coaching?



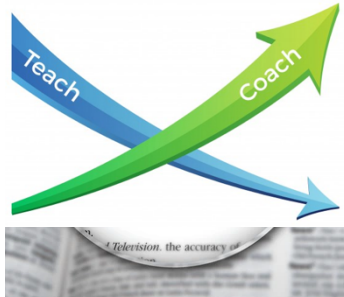
People will always define terms like ‘team coaching’ differently, and often this is only a matter of emphasis, but there do exist some fundamentally different perspectives on team coaching. For example, some say the team coach works only with the team once formedⁱⁱ. Others say team design and launch fall within the scope of team coachingⁱⁱⁱ. Wageman & Lowe suggest that getting the team composition and the launch right determine 90% of a team’s ultimate effectiveness^{iv} – so we need to have a view.

What is the role of a team coach?



Some say team coaching is a discipline in itself quite different to other disciplines such as consulting, team building, facilitation, and leading a team^v. Others say a team coach must be able to move between all these different roles^{vi}. Others suggest that such distinctions aren’t useful, and that all these activities form part of team coaching. What is the role of a team coach, and more importantly – how will you decide? What evidence will you pursue?

How does a team coach behave?



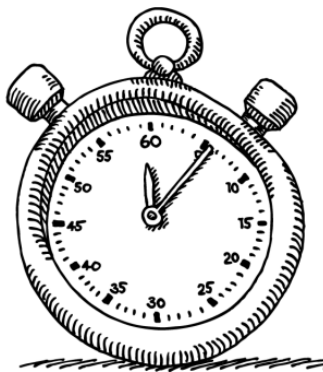
Some say that for an intervention to qualify as team coaching, it must employ a non-directive, exploratory approach^{vii}. Others highlight the importance of education, giving teams frameworks around which to build their intentions^{viii}. Others see a strong role for consulting, not being afraid to adopt a subject-matter-expertise position if appropriate, a position that others would associate more with consulting. How do you as a team coach behave? And on what basis did you come to that conclusion?

Team dynamics



Many team coaches see themselves adding most value in helping a team recognise and evolve its ways of working together. Hackman & Wageman suggest that a focus on interpersonal process is based on a “logical fallacy” and that if you help a team improve its performance, then interpersonal processes will look after themselves^{ix}. Is a focus on team dynamics essential, or is that view based on a ‘logical fallacy’? How did you decide?

When is the best time?



Most of us see team coaching as an ongoing, regular activity, and if a team stops making the time to be coached, then that means either the team is not committed, or I (as coach) must be doing a bad job. Connie Gersick, however, working with project teams, suggests that teams will want to work with you only at the beginning, end, and middle of their time together^x. In which case it may not be helpful to push teams to meet with you more often. What is your philosophy and how did you come by it?

Can I coach the team and the leader?



Some people say yes^{xi} you can. The team leader is your ultimate client and part of your role is to help them navigate the process. Others say no^{xii}. Your role is to help the team, and if the team know you have special relationships with some members of that team, that will diminish the extent to which you will be able to create safe space for that team. What’s your view and how did you come by it?

What even is a team?



Should probably have put this one first! Some people say teams have clear boundaries and stability of membership^{xiii}. The ICT team coaching competencies, for example, say that the team coach “*promotes the team viewing itself as a single entity with a common identity.*” Others suggest this is not a particularly useful philosophy, given how quickly some teams form and disband, how fast membership can evolve, and how often people work across different teams, continually switching their attentions from one team to another^{xiv}. How do you talk to your clients about the definition of a team, the importance of membership stability etc ...? Where’s the evidence supporting your perspective? What evidence appears to contradict your perspective?

Answers please?

Notice we haven’t given you any answers to these questions. We do have our own perspectives, perspectives we make explicit in [our own approach](#) to working with teams. But we don’t seek to advocate our approach as the right approach. Our approach is evidence-based, in that we researched more than 500 academic articles and books to identify themes, models and approaches. Our approach sits well with our view of the world. But it is not the only way of interpreting the evidence, and the research on which it is based will become outdated, and it may not sit well with your way of looking at the world. So whilst you may find it both useful and interesting, we encourage you to develop your own approach – your 4Ps.

The 4Ps of team coaching

The 4Ps is a framework we first came across in coaching supervision^{xv}. The 4Ps is a framework enabling you to clarify your own approach to team coaching. It asks you to define:

- Your **philosophy**. Which theories, models, and frameworks do you subscribe to? What does your own experience tell you? How do your own personal values and beliefs show up in the work that you do?
- Your **purpose**. Why do you do this work? It’s not easy, after all – and not always fun!
- Your **practice**. What would a fly-on-the-wall see you doing when you’re working with a team?

And based on those reflections:

- What is your **plan** for becoming an even better team coach?

The 4Ps framework is not in itself evidence-based, but used well it encourages the practitioner to think rigorously about their underpinning philosophy – what do I think a team is? What do I think team coaching is? It encourages us to think about why we do the work – is it because I like

to see teams do well? Or do I think organisations just *have* to address team effectiveness if they are to achieve organisational effectiveness? How do I coach – what is my approach to timing? Will I coach the team and members of the team individually? Is it OK to coach by myself, or should I always coach with a colleague?

The 4Ps also enable us to be humble and curious as to the way in which other team coaches operate. We don't suggest you use the 4Ps to establish a single, best, way of working with teams. Rather it enables you to clarify why you like to work the way you do. It encourages you to challenge and think critically about what others are saying. It enables you to be curious and to learn from others, rather than instantly agree or disagree with what others suggest. You might not agree with everything Sally Coach says, but one or two things she says may intrigue you, and may end up embedded in your own, evolving, perspective on coaching.

Holding the 4Ps as an ongoing and evolving reference point enables us to continue to explore our approach to team coaching and to hold ourselves accountable for continuing to learn, develop, and contribute to the field.

In conclusion

Most of us like a simple life. When becoming a team coach, we look for the book that tells us how to do it. That's why there are lots of books out there that seek to provide that certainty. There is another perspective that says much of the work we do is complex, that there is no definitive evidence to answer many of the questions that we have, and there probably never will be evidence to answer all the questions we have as practitioners working in an infinite variety of situations and circumstance. Those of us who share that perspective acknowledge the need to be forever questioning and challenging what we are told by others in our world, in service of continually evolving our own rigorously thought through approach to the work that we do. If this perspective interests you, then work through the first of the 3Ps. What comes up for you? What are you uncertain about? What are you curious about? Then wrap up those questions into the next stage of your development plan. What will you research? Who will you talk to? What experiments will you build into your existing practice?

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Notes

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- iii Peters, J. & Carr, C. (2019). What does 'good' look like? An overview of the research on the effectiveness of team coaching. In: D. Clutterbuck, J. Gannon, S. Hayes, I. Iordanou, K. Lowe & D. Mackie (Eds.), *The Practitioner's Handbook of Team Coaching*, Routledge
- iv Wageman, R. & Lowe, K. (2019). Designing, launching, and coaching teams: the 60-30-10 Rule and its implications for team coaching. In: D. Clutterbuck, J. Gannon, S. Hayes, I. Iordanou, K. Lowe & D. Mackie (Eds.), *The Practitioner's Handbook of Team Coaching*, Routledge
- v Clutterbuck, D. (2007). *Coaching the Team at Work*, Nicholas Brealey International
- vi Clutterbuck, D. et al. (2019)
- vii Clutterbuck, D. et al. (2019)
- viii Lawrence, P. (2017). What do experienced team coaches do? Current practice in Australia and New Zealand. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 15(1), 95-113
- ix Hackman, J. R. & Wageman, R. (2005). A Theory of Team Coaching. *The Academy of Management Review*, 30(2), 269-287
- x Gersick, C. J. G. (1988). Time and transition in work teams: Toward a new model of group development. *Academy of Management Journal*, 31(1), 9-41 and Gersick, C. J. G. (1989). Marking time: Predictable transitions in task groups. *Academy of Management Journal*, 32(2), 274-309
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- xii Hawkins, P. (2019). Systemic Team Coaching. In: D. Clutterbuck, J. Gannon, S. Hayes, I. Iordanou, K. Lowe & D. Mackie (Eds.), *The Practitioner's Handbook of Team Coaching*, Routledge
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- xiv Mortensen, M. (2015). Boundary multiplicity: Rethinking teams and boundedness in the light of today's collaborative environment. *INSEAD Working Papers No. 2015/31/OBH*. Retrieved from <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers>
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