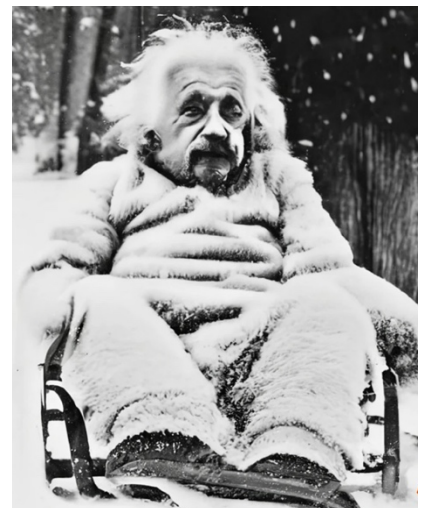


Quarterly Reflections on Team Coaching

July – September 2025

Team coaching – 10 cool ideas



Introduction

In the last QRT we reviewed some of the contradictions we all experience in considering different authors' guidance on team coaching. Rather than come up with our own perspective on those themes, we encouraged you to explore those issues for yourself, by sifting through the evidence, and reflecting on your own experiences as a team coach. We offered you the 4Ps framework as a simple means by which to clarify your own personal approach to team coaching. Our own approach to team coaching has evolved and refined over the years and is much informed by a two year meta-review of the literature on team effectiveness. In this QRT we summarise some of the cool ideas we discovered in the literature, ideas we have translated into practical steps a team coach can deploy with their clients.

Ten cool ideas

Focus on the meta!



Many authors talk about the importance of boundaries and stability of membership. If the boundaries aren't clear – and people are forever coming and going, then it isn't a real team, and the team coach should avoid doing the work. This may not always be a helpful philosophy in today's world, where teams are becoming more fluid. In such cases it may be useful to think in terms of teams and meta-teamsⁱ. Instead of focussing our efforts on helping the smaller group team effectively, we focus our efforts on the bigger pool of people

from where people are continually being assigned and re-assigned. That might be a consulting function, an organisational function, a division, or even the whole organisation. The task here is to help everyone to become a better teamer, so that whatever the state of a particular team, everyone knows how to best contribute.

The dialogic coach



A few years ago I interviewed 36 experienced team coaches to find out what they didⁱⁱ. A handful of them said that they did dialogue – just dialogue. They said if they could help the team get better at talking with each other, then the team were then better able to resolve arising issues, and to align around how they worked together. Some people shrug their shoulders as if this were obvious, but when we talk about dialogue, we don't just mean two people talking. The 'dia' in dialogue doesn't mean 'two' – it means

'through', and dialogue is then a process of creating new meaning through relationship. To engage in dialogue is hard^{iii iv v}.

Trust – affective and cognitive



Some suggest that trust has affective and cognitive dimensions^{vi}. The affective dimensions are about the feelings we have for other people, and the feelings we think others have for us. When teams work on trust they often focus on affective trust, getting to know and understand each other, working out how best to interpret what other people say and do. But we might just as usefully focus on cognitive trust, the extent to which we think others are competent, reliable, and dependable. Cognitive trust can be built fast (hence the possibility of building *swift trust*), though it may be more fragile. The distinction is often a useful one, particularly for teams who want to build foundation levels of trust quickly.

Conflict – task and relationship



I've talked to people who've told me their teams are doing great because they experience no conflict – everything is always happy and harmonious. That always worries me, for if there is no conflict, it implies there is no overt disagreement. If there is no disagreement, that implies no diversity of thought. Various authors distinguish between task conflict and relationship conflict^{vii}.

Relationship conflict is personal, and always correlates negatively with team performance. Task conflict is disagreement around an issue, and generally correlates positively with team performance. The challenge for teams is that task conflict often leaks into relationship conflict. The challenge for teams is to pay attention to the conflict happening in a team and to develop the collective ability to manage task conflict well.

Diversity – surface level and deep



Many organisations remain focussed on better acknowledging and managing diversity. These programs often focus on gender, ethnicity, or other visible personal characteristics, and these programs are important. We know that people still treat people differently based on gender, skin colour et cetera. But if we focus solely on surface-level differences we may ignore aspects of diversity that are less obvious, less visible. If we have ten middle aged white men in a room, that doesn't mean we can take our eyes off the diversity-ball. There may be all sorts of dynamics happening in the room based on less visible aspects of diversity. Various authors alert us to deep level diversity and steps we can take to reveal those diversities and work them most effectively^{viii}.

Multi-team membership



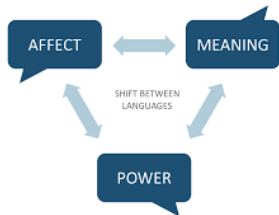
One author wrote “Some organisations like to assign people to multiple teams simultaneously. If your company practices this fractional assignment, I have some good news. You can instantly improve productivity by reassigning people to one project at a time.”^{ix}. Other evidence suggests this may not only be wishful thinking, it may also be untrue. There are pros and cons of people working across multiple teams^x, and at least seven things teams can do to mitigate the downsides of multi-team membership.

Making it SNOW



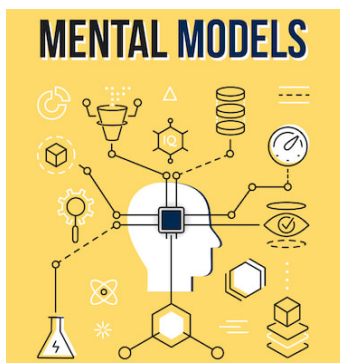
Bennett Bratt introduces us to the SNOW model in his book *The Team Discovered. Dialogic Team Coaching*. The SNOW Model is a simple process that provides a language for teams to See, Name, Own, and Work with their own dynamics. Used in conjunction with techniques that help co-create the safe space for those conversations to take place, the SNOW model is a great first step in empowering teams to own their own dynamics rather than rely solely on the ability of someone from outside.

Structural dynamics



Kantor’s provides three frames through which to See and Name specific aspects of team dynamics. These frames enable people to characterise themselves in terms of the value they bring to a team. The models help us move from deficit thinking to a more abundant way of thinking about the world. Kantor writes about Model Clash, the collision of two ways of making meaning of the world, and how to navigate Model Clash by inviting people to appreciate the differences that led to the collision.

Task & teamwork mental models



Most, if not all, writers in the team coaching space suggest that team coaches can be especially useful in helping teams align around a particular way forward, a specific set of objectives and goals. They write about the value of agreeing a ‘team charter’ that details how the team will work together. The problem in real life is that teams often agree objectives and ways of working together, but then go off and act as if those conversations had never taken place. The literature on task and team work mental models^{xi} provides us with the insights we need to frame the kinds of conversation people will need to have if they are to wholly commit themselves to a shared course of action. When a team comes together, the members of that team come with pre-existing perspectives on what the team might most usefully achieve and how people must work together to get things done.

By uncovering those task and teamwork mental models, the coach and team leader can guide the team to having the kinds of conversations required to understand and work with that variety of perspectives.

Four dimensions of building a team



Some team coaches aren't interested in learning more about building a team because they don't see that as being in-scope for a team coach. Other authors are quite explicit in framing it as squarely within the role of a team coach^{xii}. For those of you who do see the initial and ongoing recruitment of a team as in-scope, you might be interested in the work of John Mathieu et al. who proposed four dimensions for building teams^{xiii}. Most recruitment frameworks focus on the individual, the skills and competencies required for the job and, perhaps, the propensity of the person to team well with others. Mathieu's model encourages us to think also about the needs of the team as a whole. Outside of individual job descriptions, what other skills does this team need right now, and what are the dynamics of the team calling out for in terms of communication and relating styles?

In conclusion

In the last QRT we reviewed the 4Ps Model, a framework for clarifying your own approach to team coaching. I once presented that model to a group of academic, who were horrified. How can you suggest people should decide for themselves how they will coach? Surely you should be *telling* them what to do, on the basis of all the available evidence? Two answers to that. First, the evidence is not conclusive. Second, the framework actively encourages people to be rigorous in their thinking, to go out there and interrogate the literature in search of new insights, to go talk to people, to listen to podcasts et cetera, and to challenge what they hear. Team coaching as a discrete discipline in organisations is new, and many of the answers we seek are unclear. We need to go looking for those insights, to challenge those insights, and to translate those ideas that resonate into clear and practical approaches. Hopefully these ten cool ideas whet your appetite, all of which we have translated into pragmatic methodologies for team leaders and coaches in the *Team Coaching Companion*, an articulation of our 4Ps!

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Notes

- ⁱ Santistevan, D. & Josserand, E. (2018). Meta-Teams: Getting Global Work Done in MNEs. *Journal of Management*, 45(2), 510–539

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- ii Lawrence, P. & Whyte, A. (2017). What do Experienced Team Coaches Do? Current Practice in Australia and New Zealand. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 15(1), 94-113
 - iii Bohm, D. (2004). *On Dialogue*. Routledge.
 - iv Isaacs, W. (2008). *Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together*. Crown.
 - v Lawrence, P. et al. (2019). *The Tao of Dialogue*. Routledge.
 - vi e.g. Costa, A.C., Fulmer, C.A. & Anderson., N.R. (2017). Trust in Work Teams: An Integrative Review, Multilevel Model, and Future Directions. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, 39, 169–184
 - vii e.g. Harvey, C.E.J., Courtright, S. & Bradley. B. (2019). What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger: How Teams Rebound from Early-Stage Relationship Conflict. *Journal of Management*, 45, 1623-1659
 - viii e.g. Bell, S.T. & Outland, N. (2017). Team Composition Over Time. *Research on Managing Groups and Teams*, 18, 3-27
 - ix Shore, J. & Warden, S. (2007). *Art of Agile Development*. O'Reilly Media
 - x Margolis, J. (2020). Multiple Team Membership: An Integrative Review. *Small Group Research*, 51(1), 48–86
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 - xii Peters, J. (2019). High Performance Coaching. An Evidence-Based System to Enable Team Effectiveness. In: D. Clutterbuck, J. Gannon, S. Hayes, I. Iordanou, K. Lowe & D. MacKie [Eds.]. *The Practitioner's Handbook of Team Coaching*. Routledge.
 - xiii Mathieu, J.E., Tannenbaum, S., Donsbach, J.S. & Alliger, G.M. (2014). A Review and Integration of Team Composition Models: Moving Toward a Dynamic and Temporal Framework. *Journal of Management*, 40(1), 130–160