

COACHING IN ACTION GUIDE

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

Team Coaching

Team coaching, despite the absence of an agreed theory, continues to grow. Practitioner-led publications and an increased interest from both the professional coaching bodies and academic institutions are supporting team coaching as it

rises quickly from the shadows of its successful forebearer, executive coaching.

This guide explores how team coaching has developed and outlines three tried-and-tested team coaching techniques.



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The growth of team coaching

There is almost universal agreement that team coaching is a relatively new concept that lacks the consistency of definition, practice and empirical evidence (Clutterbuck, 2014; Jones et al, 2019; O'Connor & Cavanagh, 2016).

Nevertheless, the demand and interest in team coaching is growing. The *Ridler Report* (2016) noted that while team coaching accounted for 9% of total coaching, some 76% of the organisations surveyed expected to increase their use of team coaching over the next two years. This growth in team coaching is being supported by an increasing number of practitioner-led textbooks (see Thornton, 2016; Widdowson & Barbour, 2020).

What is a team?

Before considering a definition of team coaching, it is important to understand what we mean by 'team'. The word is widely yet oftentimes loosely used. Indeed, many teams are teams in name only. Katzenback and Smith (1993: 45) suggest a team is:

a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.

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Despite the numerous efforts to define team coaching, it is evident that confusion still exists.
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What is team coaching?

Team coaching definitions have highlighted the importance of a common goal, individual performance, group collaboration and performance (Thornton, 2016), increasing collective capability (Clutterbuck, 2014; Jones et al, 2019), as well as the importance of thinking 'systemically' and not just within the confines of the team (Hawkins, 2017).

We define team coaching as follows:

Team coaching helps teams work together, with others and within their wider environment, to create lasting change by developing safe and trusting relationships, better ways of working and new thinking, so that they maximise their collective potential, purpose and performance goals.

It is our view that while team coaching will differ in terms of design and delivery, team coaching can be used to coach any team – be it senior leadership, functional, cross-functional, dispersed, both joint account and client, temporary, project or virtual.



How does team coaching differ from other key team interventions?

Despite the numerous efforts to define team coaching, it is evident that confusion still exists. To help increase clarity, it is helpful to draw comparisons to some other major types of team intervention.

- **Group coaching:** Hawkins has differentiated group coaching, with its similarity to action-learning sets, as 'the coaching of individuals within a group context', from team coaching, where 'the primary client is the whole team, rather than the individual team members' (2017: 71).
- **Team building:** Team building tends to focus on improving interpersonal relationships, productivity and alignment with an organisation's goals. It typically consists of short, often one-day interventions (Kriek & Venter, 2009). In contrast, team coaching is considered to typically take place over a series of sessions (Jones et al, 2019).
- **Team facilitation:** While a coach may at times use facilitation skills, facilitation can be considered a way of helping a team manage their dialogue, compared to team coaching, which aims to empower a team to take ownership for their own dialogue (Clutterbuck, 2007).

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A team coach's 'way of being' is the most important part of their becoming an effective team coach, while frameworks, tools and techniques aid them in designing and delivering interventions.

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Developing as a team coach

Hawkins (2017) explores the differences between competencies, capabilities and capacities. He distinguishes between competencies and capabilities: while both are about know-how, capabilities relate to how the team coach knows when and how to use and apply the different skills. In addition, he relates capacity to one's 'being' rather than one's 'doing', and further states that such:

capacities are not things to be acquired or places to arrive. Each capacity takes our whole life to develop.

(Hawkins, 2017: 261)

Hawkins proposes that the capacities of a team coach will only grow and develop further if the team coach continues to practise and engage in supervision. It is our belief that a team coach's 'way of being' is the most important part of their becoming an effective team coach, while the models, frameworks, tools and techniques aid them in designing and delivering interventions.



Team coaching models and frameworks

Given the increased demand for team coaching, it is not surprising that there is an increasing number of models and frameworks available for team coaches to use. Three such examples are given below:

Five disciplines of successful team practice

The five disciplines – commissioning, clarifying, co-creating, connecting and core learning – have been developed both in and with teams (particularly leadership teams) over a 40 year period. The model is the focus of the work of Hawkins (2017), and offers a systemic and multi-disciplinary approach to team coaching that attends to important external factors, as well as the internal relationships and perspectives of the team's work (Lawrence & Whyte, 2017).

The META framework

The 'mobilise, execute and transform with agility' (META) framework is based on the research of Toye and Price (2017), undertaken with over 3,000 teams. The framework features drive and drag factors that need to be considered for teams to accelerate their performance. The findings demonstrate that teams who show all the drive accelerators have, on average, an economic impact of 22.8% higher than that of underperforming teams (Toye & Price, 2017).

'Creating the team edge' framework

The 'creating the team edge' framework, shown in Figure 1, consists of seven characteristics (described in Table 1) that can be used by team coaches as a basis for coaching a team. Results from a study at a leading UK retailer highlighted three main factors that contributed to improvements in individual and team development, team effectiveness and team performance (Widdowson, 2017):

1. Alignment of purpose

The teams became aligned in their purpose, values and beliefs, identity and collective team goals.

2. Psychological safety

The teams developed an increased level of psychological safety, meaning they could be more open and honest, could show vulnerability and give robust feedback.

3. Team learning

The teams shared knowledge and best practice with each other. Table 2 provides an example of a 'creating the team edge' programme.

Figure 1: Creating the team edge



© Performance Edge 2015

(Widdowson, 2017)

Table 1: Creating the team edge: Seven characteristics and descriptions

Characteristic	Description
Purpose	A statement of why the team exists. The purpose statement captures the spirit of the team working together to uniquely contribute towards the goals of its own organisation, its stakeholders and the wider system. The statement only has weight when accompanied by collective performance goals.
Identity	The team works on developing their unique identity. The identity binds them together and constantly reinforces the team's positive mindset, energy and motivation. The team identity will be recognised and admired by both those inside and outside the team.
Values and beliefs	Values and beliefs in teams provide a sense of what is right and wrong. The team explores and agrees on the culture it desires and the values, standards and behaviours that will underpin the team's efforts. Belief in the team's purpose, identity and values are essential for the team to fully perform.
Awareness	Teams increase their awareness and consciousness of each other's strengths and personal preferences, and how to leverage them for the benefit of the team as a whole. The team also develops an awareness of how it interacts with its wider stakeholders and system.
Relatedness	Teams develop their sense of unity and build mutual trust, support and understanding. Teams invest time in open and honest conversations to work more closely together and build strong relationships within the wider organisation.
Ways of working	The team invests time in setting up the best systems and processes to enable its members to make confident and effective decisions. The team works on improving the structure of meetings and how it engages with others, in order to deliver concrete outcomes.
Transformation	Teams explore ways to challenge their performance and look for opportunities to test their abilities. The team rigorously reviews its plans, applies innovative ways to think differently and ensure the team members are always improving, learning and supporting each others' development.



Table 2: Example of a 'creating the team edge' programme

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6
Complete team questionnaire	Design and agree team coaching journey	Team coaching Workshop 1: Building relationships, trust, purpose, identity, values and beliefs	Team coaching Workshop 2: Awareness, relatedness and ways of working	Team coaching Workshop 3: Transformation, action plans and commitments	Review: Evaluate return on investment
1-on-1 Team leader + team members					
Team questionnaire feedback					
		Team observation			
		1-on-1 coaching			
		Development and support			

(Widdowson, 2017)

Applying the theory to team coaching practice

In the following sections, we take three techniques that we have found extremely useful when team coaching and illustrate for each how they can be used by team coaches in practice.

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 A key question to ask is: what can the team deliver that team members on their own cannot?

Technique 1: Team shield – developing team purpose and values

In this fast-changing world where jobs for life are a thing of the past, individuals and teams want to be clearer about why their job exists, what is important about what they do and how it adds value to the organisation and wider community.

Teams, therefore, also want to be clearer about why and how they work together as a team. A key question to ask is: what can the team deliver that team members on their own cannot?

This tool can help teams become clearer on their collective answers to these questions. It can be used for teams of any size and composition, and is probably best used at the beginning of a team coaching programme.

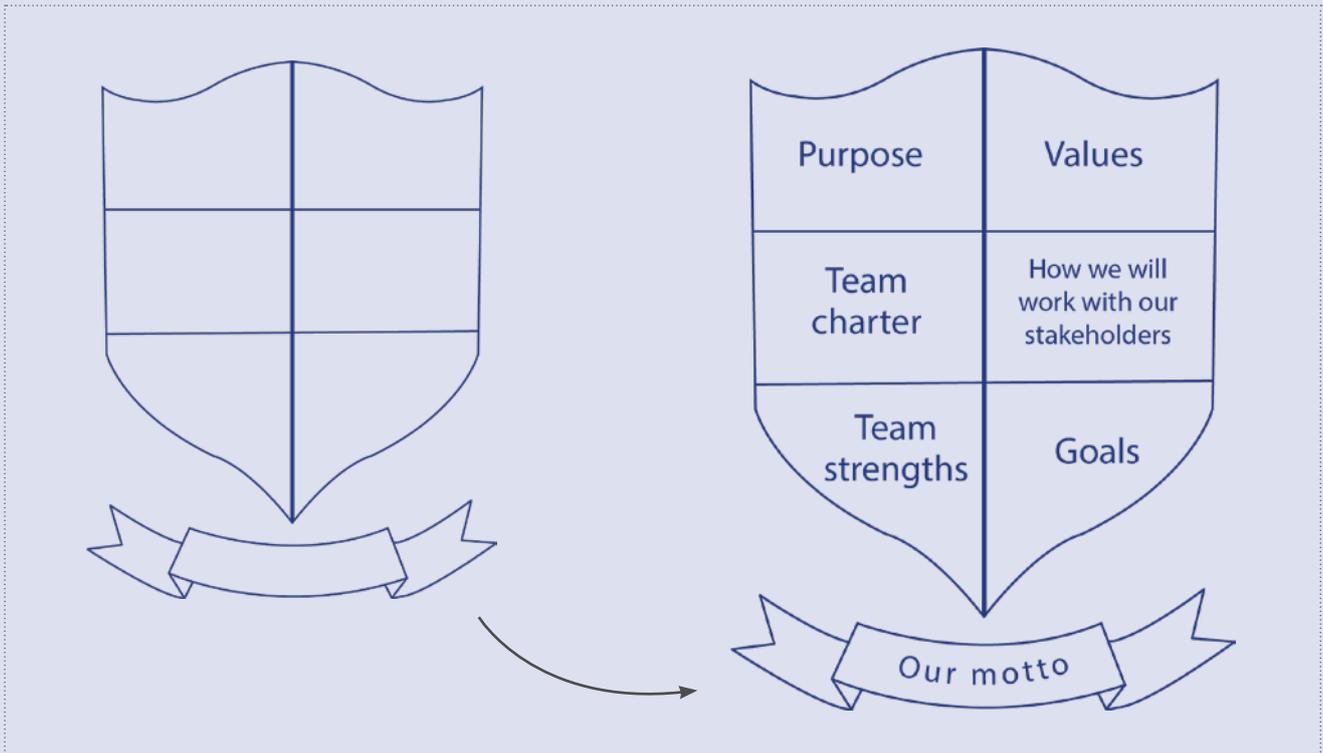
This technique helps teams:

- develop a compelling purpose, a strapline or team motto
- agree on the values that are important to them
- articulate and recognise what they are good at and how they will work with stakeholders within their organisational system

Exercise: Team shield

- Draw a team shield divided into five or six sections, like the one shown in Figure 2 (overleaf).
- Agree on a heading for each section of the shield. Potential headings are given below:
 - Purpose
 - Vision
 - Goals
 - Values
 - Team charter
 - Strengths
 - Qualities
 - Behaviours
 - How the team will work with stakeholders
 - Team motto
- Split the team into sub-groups and task each group to work on one of the shield sections for around 30 minutes.
- During this time, group members from each group have the opportunity to collaborate with other groups to gain further insights and check team alignment across the different sections of the team shield. Sub-groups can send scouts out to other groups to share and build on each other's ideas.

Figure 2: Team shield diagram



- At the end of the allotted time, all parts of the shield are displayed together.
- The entire team shares their outputs, asking each other questions.
- The team then agrees on any amends, resulting in the final team shield content.
- Finally, the team discusses and agrees on next steps and how they will apply the team shield.

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The team shield can help teams clarify their collective answers to why and how they work together.
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Top tip

- Teams can sometimes find it challenging to craft a purpose statement. It may help to focus on capturing phrases and ideas first and to gain insight from other groups before setting to work on your own statement.



Technique 2: Feedback goldfish bowl – developing relatedness

Teams often shy away from having 'real', open and honest conversations. However, it is essential for teams and team members to have robust conversations, in order to work more closely together, build strong relationships and, ultimately, improve their individual and team performance.

Teams that lack trust can often avoid debating ideas and engaging in difficult conversations. This, in turn, leads to hidden discussions and team members not openly sharing their views (Lencioni, 2002). The following technique enables teams to address these issues.

This technique helps team members:

- increase awareness of their strengths and areas to work on
- give and receive feedback from one another
- improve individual and team performance

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Feedback should be given with good intention and received as a gift.
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Exercise: Feedback goldfish bowl

This exercise can be very impactful and enlightening for teams. It can also be very challenging for team members who haven't previously provided feedback for each other. It is therefore important to help the team build connection and rapport with each other beforehand and also for the team coach to create a feeling of psychological safety and trust.

- Discuss with the team important aspects of giving and receiving feedback. For example: feedback should be given with positive intention; feedback is received with the appreciation that 'feedback is a gift'; feedback should be specific and, where possible, should explain the impact of the behaviour.
- Give each member of the team around 15 minutes to consider and capture their feedback, answering the following questions with regards to each team member:
 - In what ways does the team member contribute to this being a high performing team?
 - In what ways does the team member hinder this being a high performing team?
- Bring the team together in a circle (sitting or standing).
- Each team member takes it in turn to receive feedback from every other team member.



- As each team member receives feedback, another team member should be appointed to capture the feedback in writing for their colleague, allowing the feedback receiver to focus on listening to what is said. It is important to rotate this scribing responsibility.
- The team member receiving the feedback shouldn't enter into dialogue around the feedback, but should receive it by just saying 'thank you'.
- The scribe gives the feedback notes to the team member who has just received the feedback.
- Once all feedback has been offered and received, it can be helpful to leave some time for personal reflection and for each team member to note down any actions for the future.
- After the exercise, it is important to ask the team to consider how they will continue to give and receive feedback, once back at work.

In most cases, this proves to be an extremely powerful, insightful and, in many instances, transformative exercise for team members.

Top tips

- It is important that the team coach makes a judgement call on the readiness or otherwise of the team members to use this technique to give each other feedback.
- It is vital that the team coach takes time at the start of the exercise to contract clearly with team members how the technique works and the spirit in which the feedback should be given and received.



- Choose how you want to collate the responses; some suggestions are given below:
 - Create a matrix table on a flipchart, with the seven characteristics written along the top (Purpose, Identity, etc) and the team members down the side (see Table 4, below). Ask team members to capture their responses on the flipchart. You will then be able to add them up to work out which areas have come out as strengths and which as areas to work on.
 - Send the questionnaire out before the session and collate the responses in advance, adding up totals for each characteristic.

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The challenge is knowing what to develop so that efforts are efficiently targeted. This technique enables a team to understand how they measure up.

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- Ask team members to collectively review their responses and consider the following:
 - What is an area of strength?
 - What is the key area they need to work on?

Table 4: Example summary of responses matrix

Team members	Purpose	Identity	Values and beliefs	Awareness	Relatedness	Ways of working	Transformation
1. Julie	7	3	5	7	7	5	3
2. Jack	6	2	4	6	6	5	3
3. Siobhan	5	4	6	7	5	6	2
4. Russell	5	5	7	7	6	4	4
5. Tim	6	3	5	5	7	5	3
6. Ingrid	8	5	6	6	7	6	4
Total	37	22	33	38	38	31	19
Team average	6	3.6	5.5	6.3	6.3	5	3



- Facilitate a team discussion and agree answers to the following questions:
 - What are the next steps to work on in order to develop?
 - How can team members leverage team strengths to help them with this?

Even though this technique is not the full diagnostic, it can still be helpfully employed to ascertain the initial views of some key internal and external stakeholders.

Top tip

- For each of the questions in the questionnaire, replace the phrase 'my team' with the name of your team. Then send the questionnaire out before the session and/or get different team members to interview key stakeholders using the seven questions. The similarities or variances of other stakeholders' answers compared to the team's responses will help accelerate the development of team awareness.

Conclusion

The increased focus on organisational purposes that serve a more diverse set of stakeholders along with the increasing reliance on teams to help organisations to perform, is ensuring the continued growth of the demand for team coaching. This growth can be supported by professional coaching bodies embracing team coaching, leading academic institutions developing accredited team coaching programmes, more practitioner-led publications, and a larger body of team coaching literature. Above all, team coaching needs more team coaches who are committed to developing their 'way of being', competencies and capabilities.

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We look forward to many more joining us on this exciting journey, and hope that the techniques outlined in this guide go some way to helping coaches take their first steps into team coaching.

Recommended reading

Books

- Clutterbuck, D (2007) *Coaching the Team at Work*. London: Nicholas Brealey International
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Henley Centre for Coaching

The Henley Centre for Coaching is a global leader in coaching research and coach training. We are the only triple-accredited coaching provider in the world offering both postgraduate university qualifications in coaching and accreditation from the Association for Coaching (AC), the International Coach Federation (ICF) and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC).

The Centre provides formal accredited coach training through our Professional Certificate in Coaching and MSc in Coaching and Behavioural Change, and accredited supervision training through our Professional Certificate in Supervision. These programmes are delivered in the UK at our Greenlands campus, and at venues across the world.

The Centre provides continuous professional development for coaching professionals through masterclasses, webinars, conferences, and via online access to journals, ebooks and coaching research. These are all delivered through our online learning platform, meaning coaches can connect from anywhere in the world to engage in professional development.

The Henley coaching team consists of leading practitioners and academics who have shaped the coaching profession since the late 1990s. They have written many of the most popular coaching books and they continue to publish in leading management

journals and to contribute at conferences worldwide. Their writing, thinking and research informs our teaching and ensures our programmes are at the cutting edge of coaching practice.

The Centre offers annual membership to all professional coaches, providing a virtual-learning environment where the members shape research and practice in coaching. Check out our website for details on how we can help you and your business come to life.

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