

# Team coaching: passing trend or organizational staple?

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Coaching has grown exponentially since its popular inception in the 1970's (Clutterbuck, D. and Turner, T., 2017). Executive coaching has become a staple of many organizations, as has collaborative leadership and leader/manager as coach training programs. In fewer than 25 years, business coaching in the US alone has become an \$11 billion industry with over 88,000 coaches in nearly 52,000 businesses (IBIS Business, October 2017). In 2017, globalization, complexity, and disruption have perhaps contributed to an estimated 32 percent of organizations' surveyed striving to be more adaptable and team-centric (Deloitte, p. 22).

On the surface, the trend toward team coaching seems to be both a natural progression in the coaching industry as well as a more cost effective and impactful way for organizations to embed collaborative leadership. Yet are we as coaches prepared? And are organizations clear about what is required for team coaching to work sustainably to enhance their cultures? This chapter will begin to dispel the myth that the progression from one-to-one coaching to team coaching is a linear progression. It will also examine the history of working with teams to illustrate the complexity and nuances involved. The intention of this chapter is to foster rich dialogue between the buyer and the supplier of team coaching to build the relationship necessary to deliver team and group coaching in a complex global economy.

## Current climate

To date most coaching training, research and publication has been for application in a one-to-one format with the coach being the master of the process and the client being the master of their content. Evidenced-based research cannot support what makes one-to-one coaching 'work' and there are no agreed industry standards, competencies or metrics across

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the professional bodies (Turner, Lucas and Whitaker, 2018). Similarly, if we look for clarification around what team coaching is, then as of October 2017 a search on the Association for Coaching (AC), Association of Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision (APECS), International Coaching Federation (ICF) and European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) websites indicate that they have no published team coaching definitions, nor standards' on what is required to deliver it.

As the professional bodies set the industry standards, the lack of standardization has unwanted consequences:

- Core competencies established for individual coaching are not specifically delineated for team coaching. *Risk: Team coaches may be using inappropriate techniques.*
- Accredited team coaching training is being approved against a one-to-one coaching standard. *Risk: Team coaches take the methodology into organizations with mixed impact.*
- Confusion about the team coaching intervention. *Risk: Inability to manage complexity and/or ensure consistent team coaching delivery.*

Regardless of if you are a coach seeking training or a purchaser of team coaching, these deficits create pause for concern. Rather than being fearful, understanding the current climate can open constructive dialogue. Begin by outlining the desired outcome to create the necessary change. As the engagement unfolds, openly discussing what's being learned can minimize risk and ensure a more sustainable outcome. A more complete checklist follows later in the chapter.

Although team coaching standards currently do not exist, working with teams is certainly not a new concept. Understanding what some fundamental historical underpinnings of team coaching may help us advance robust delivery in the organizational landscapes of the future.

## The history of learning in organizations

Learning together is not a new concept. Methodologies that underpin team coaching can be traced back nearly 100 years and are borrowed from management consulting, adult learning, psychology, social science and one-to-one coaching. Familiarizing ourselves with this background may foster shared understanding so organizations and coaches can deepen

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their dialogue about what is required for team development. It may also advance industry requirements for team coaching to have longevity and equipping coaches.

Industrialization: Organizational need for efficiency

In a time when driverless cars are looming, it is hard to imagine a past where roads were being shared with horses and automobiles were being built one component at a time. However, if we go back to the early 1900's, the need for efficient organizations that manufactured cars and other items en masse created the opportunity to listen to workers, understand improvements and was the dawn of organizational learning.

Beginning in Frankfurt, 1921, a group of social scientists founded *Die Akademie der Arbeit* (now the European Academy of Labor). The academy was the first to offer specific courses for industrial workers to develop their individual thinking and apply the concepts of 'andragogy' where the learner's experience creates their source of self-identity and learning is organised around life/work situations. A fundamental coaching concept - self-directed learning - is born.

From 1927 to 1932 at the Western Electric Company in Cicero, Illinois, an Australian-born sociologist Elton Mayo and Americans Lillian M. Gilbreth and William Dyer studied the physical, environmental and psychological aspects of factory workers. They identified the conditions for building an effective work team and a productive culture, by building a sense of group identity. Key elements included the manager taking a personal interest in each person's achievements, regular performance feedback, and consulting the group before making changes (Mayo, 1946; Lawrence and Steck, 1991). Although today's team coaches, consultants and human resources professionals would take these concepts for granted, at the time they were unprecedented.

Expanding on these concepts, John Dewey (1938) introduced revolutionary teaching concepts such as genuine education must come through experience and as a result, the teachers' role is to set the conditions for learning to avoid directing the outcome. As a leader in facilitation, Dewey sets forth that learning is "a cooperative rather than dictatorial enterprise". He suggests teachers extract learning by using the learner's environment and experiences; selecting activities that encouraged knowledge enhancement; and looked

ahead to ensure that they are conducive to continued growth (Jarvis, p. 209). This adult learning theory is fundamental to coaching's success.

William Whyte's studies of American multinational CEO's and decision making with their teams (1949) popularized the term groupthink used in George Orwell's book *1984* as 'rationalized conformity'. Instead of independent evaluation and decision making, groupthink assumes that the leader has significant or direct influence over the group. Groupthink also occurs when the group values cohesion and harmony over rationality, which colors their decision-making capabilities (Whyte, W.H., 1952; Janis, I., 1971; Leana, Carrie R., 1985). This research signposts that for collective decisions to be the most appropriate for the business (not just team harmony) we must have a deep understanding of group dynamics. This has implications for the team coach, explored later in this chapter.

The twentieth century may have begun as a time when the worker was simply a cog in the assembly line and the Ford Motor Company's concept of efficiency through workflow. But the contributions from these early pioneers initiated thinking of an organizational culture where individuals' opinions matter and by working together in groups achieves a better outcome. Moving toward a more person-centred approach breaks the cycle of groupthink and bias as well as enhances open communication.

Knowledge sharing: Organizational need for effectiveness

By the mid-1950's education became readily accessible to the masses and knowledge became the new currency. Organizations expanded from national to multi-national, hierarchal to international hierarchy and popular western culture began pervading other non-western cultures. Increased education meant a workforce who could solve problems and create efficiencies in the system. To guide the worker's thinking, the modern manager directed discussion to help a colleague to solve a problem or to do a task better than would otherwise have been the case (Megginson & Boydell, 1979). Building upon previous learning concepts, the manager has now become a coach – or is using what we would now label coaching skills.

Iconoclast Peter F. Drucker posited, "that the major obstacle to organizational growth is managers' inability to change their attitudes and behavior as rapidly as their organizations

require" (1954). He advocated collaborative management over the command and control model and asserted that decentralized companies are more effective. As a potentially early team coach, Drucker's unique approach was "to be ignorant and ask a few questions" (Wartzman, R., 2012). Drucker may have been one of the first to label his techniques as bedrock elements of coaching: relational presence, listening and questioning.

Extending the coaching received from the manager and to increase efficiency, in 1968 Malcolm Knowles described experiential learning concepts that change itself creates the opportunity to learn and through self-evaluation a learner can move from, "being dependent personalities toward being... self-directed" (Knowles, pp. 44-45). Knowles set the stage for other future adult learning theorists such as Maria Boucouvalas, who introduced a transpersonal view of adult learning theory; Peter Jarvis, who continues to add to the theory of adult lifelong learning and Stephen Brookfield, who led the way on self-directed learning, built upon the concept that adults are a rich source of learning from each other and reflecting upon their own experiences, setting the cornerstone for the foundation of modern day coaching. In 1982 Reginald Revans, considered to be the father of action learning, introduced a specific methodology using questioning techniques and the equation  $L$  (learning) =  $P$  (programmed knowledge) +  $Q$  (questioning insight). Since then, reflective practice has added to become the theory of action learning that supports organisational problem solving and team improvement. This shift meant individual leaders are required to have coaching skills to work effectively.

In 1992 Sir John Whitmore published his seminal book, *Coaching for Performance*, and many would argue, launched the coaching industry. Whitmore's GROW (Goal, Reality, Opportunity and Will) model presented a framework for individual coaches to easily scaffold their one-to-one coaching. Co-Active Coaching (Whitworth, L., Kimsey-House, H. and Sandahl, P., 1998), then followed outlining the conditions for the coaching alliance co-created by the coachee and the coach, positioning coaching as a dynamic system, rather than a linear interaction.

Chris Argyris' and Donald Schön's research into organizational development between 1974 - 1991 identified that by expanding a narrow problem-solving focus termed "single loop learning" to include reflective practice, dubbed "double loop learning", created the

opportunity for individuals to learn and improve from mistakes. Carefully reflecting on in the moment decision making and immediately afterward to see the impact revolutionized how team members worked together. Additionally, double loop learning introduced team goals and responsibilities and built on the leader as coach concept posited by Knowles and others. To better understand reflective practice in team decision making and take responsibility for their actions, Argyris formulated the "Ladder of Inference" (1991) and bridged double loop learning into action learning. Introducing reflective practice into organizations as well as self and team directed goals may have contributed to the organizational imperative for both one-to-one and team coaching.

As individual leadership becomes increasingly important, academics and management consultants study what's required to lead the team and share their observations en masse. Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith differentiated a work group from a team and provided foundational skills to work with teams in their article "*The Discipline of Teams*" (1993). J. Richard Hackman outlines the five basic conditions for "*How to build a team*" (2002) including the point 'teams need expert coaching'. David Clutterbuck published his accompanying methodology in *Coaching the Team at Work* (2007) for both managers and coaches. Christine Thornton highlighted the importance of understanding *Group and Team Coaching: The Secret Life of Groups* with her eponymous book in 2010. Peter Hawkins published both *Leadership Team Coaching* (2011) and *Creating A Coaching Culture* (2012), a term that has become common organizational nomenclature. Though trendy observations initially, all of these publications have been reprinted and are still in use today. Based on the combined information in these publications and evidence of reprints, we could infer that the individual providing coaching, the organization and the people being coached must have appropriate knowledge and readiness.

Adaptability: Organizational need to learn

Learning organizations are part of a global economic and cultural ecosystem. To stay viable, the learning organization needs 'disruptive innovation' to anticipate customer's unstated needs (Christensen, 1997). Disruption: (noun) disturbance or problems which interrupt an event, activity, or process (Oxford Dictionary online, p. 507) has become an organizational call to action, "Today, if you're not disrupting yourself, someone else is; your fate is to be either the disrupter or the disrupted. There is no middle ground." (Ismail, S., 2014).

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Contributing to this disruptive ecosystem, major world events such as the collapse of the Berlin Wall, 911, climate change, on-going religious conflicts and Brexit may have been factors for:

- Decreasing respect for hierarchy and authority
- Increasing collaboration, agility and flat organizational infrastructure
- Challenging attitudes and assumptions toward cultural norms: same sex marriage, use of language, political trends, assisted death, religion and race.
- Shifting toward sustainability and resiliency – both environmentally and interpersonally
- Polarizing of acceptance and intolerance
- Pervading immediate knowledge through social media, internet and mobile applications
- Normalizing on-learning through TED, Khan Academy and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

The organization's ability to cope with constant change and threat has introduced the US Military term VUCA: volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, to describe the way in which people within organizations create resiliency and the readiness for managing and leading change (Tovar, P., 2016). Disruption, VUCA and the rate of global change may have contributed to the decline in authoritarian leadership both politically and organizationally and shift toward collaborative leaders who can engage others in creating the world in which they live and the way in which business is done. This dramatic shift positions adaptive learning as a way of operating within organizations.

Teaming: Organizational need for consistent collaboration

In 2016, Amy C. Edmondson identified that learning organizations need to actively put the team's work at the center of the organizations to be both adaptive and resilient.

Edmondson's leading-edge concept "teaming" is actively "reciprocal interdependence, where back-and-forth communication and co-ordination are essential to getting the work done" (Edmondson, p. 24). Amalgamating concepts from both the adult learning environment such as double loop learning, social science concepts that teams make better decisions together, along with elements of coaching: psychological safety, relational presence, listening and

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questioning which comprise teaming. Teaming outlines the functional elements of team coaching to create learning organizations.

In 2017 teams use their collective ideas to innovate and are organized for adaptability, innovation, and customer impact. Designing for and supporting teaming requires both functional and adaptable infrastructure. Organizations are viewed as an agile network, empowered by team leaders leading through psychological safety and orchestration of tasks, fuelled by collaboration and knowledge-sharing. The team is project-based, with responsibilities focused on products, customers, and services, but fluid titles or roles (Deloitte, p. 25).

Reviewing the past teaches us that fundamentally what underpins coaching is about teaching people how to learn and relate to themselves and others. Catalyzing this juggernaut into team coaching and extending this way of working could be a pathway forward to create learning cultures.

### Next steps: Creating sustainable learning organizations

So, what's needed to make team coaching an organizational staple?

History has also taught us that unlike one-to-one coaching, complexity within a team as well as the organization creates a learning ecosystem, which all parties are involved in co-creating. Everyone involved in team coaching (including the coach!) must be committed and dialogue openly about what is continuously being learned. Therefore, in order to make team coaching an organizational staple, we must first start with creating the learning ecosystem.

Within the learning ecosystem, both the organization and the coach have to be ready to work intimately together to create the team coaching 'contract': "the process of agreeing boundaries" and is a dialogue that establishes and then sustains the relationship.

Contracting is important at the beginning of a relationship to set out the initial terms of engagement i.e. it creates the "Contract" (an agreement that clarifies mutual expectations and obligations). Additionally, it is a critical set of skills that are used throughout the relationship, which enables all parties to voice and explore issues when things become unclear or difficult" (Turner, T., Lucas, M., and Whitaker, C., 2018). The skill of contracting

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integrates key concepts from one-to-one coaching such as curiosity, active listening, powerful questioning and direct communication. If both the team members and the team coach do not have consistent capabilities in these skills, the intervention is not team coaching.

Necessary elements for a sustainable learning culture:

- Creating an atmosphere of trust, psychological safety, experimentation and 'failing well'
- Influencing and networking with both internal and external stakeholders, above, across, below and throughout the system
- Actively adapting team membership and focus, involving all members in contributing to the strategizing to increase ownership and execution,
- Structuring fluid rather functional infrastructure
- Actively listening to challenges and unconscious bias as they emerge
- Contracting for shared outcomes
- Co-creating collective intelligence and a consciousness shared by the whole system
- Team coaching skills and capabilities (Edmondson, A.C., 2002, Hawkins, P. 2017; Turner, T., Lucas, M. and Whitaker, C., 2018)

Infrastructure is also an important consideration to maximize learning and agility. Consequently, the learning organization's structure is roles based upon expertise, interests and tasks (not function). The smaller, nimble project style teams are catalyzed around client-centred outcomes. Team leaders and members actively coach each other capturing the brightest ideas, putting their stakeholders and clients at the center of innovation to create a positive inter-relational and multi-dimensional organization. Together these elements can create the blueprint of a 21st Century learning organization.

Dialogue to establish if using team coaching is appropriate

Given the speed of change and adoption of new ideas in today's frantic world, means we may well hold an assumption that team coaching by itself will lead to an increased learning culture. However, before we dive headlong into this possibility, there are some essential conversations to have between organization and supplier.

*Question 1: Do you agree what team coaching is?*

This may sound ridiculous but based on insufficient industry standards; it is the most useful starting point. Begin the dialogue by introducing, agreeing and using a consistent and understandable definition. My definition:

*A facilitated process that enables an organized group of people the opportunity to experience how to learn together through honest dialogue and consistent reflection to enhance both themselves and the system.*

By agreeing both the coach's and the organizations' understanding of team coaching, the contract begins to form the basis for the learning ecosystem. Once established, the coach and team members can come back to re-establish that everyone is still on the same page.

*Question 2: Is the 'team' ready for coaching?*

One metric that could be applied is using the action learning equation  $L \geq EC$ : learning must be equal to or greater than the rate the environment is changing may be able to gauge if the organization is prepared for team coaching (Hawkins, P., 2017a, p. 16). If change is higher than learning within the organization, the team is unable to be coached and instead may be involved in:

- *Team Development*: any process carried out by a team, with or without assistance from outside, to develop its capability and capacity, to work well together, with its joint task
- *Team Building*: any process used to help a team in the early stages of team development
- *Team Facilitation*: facilitating the team
  - to resolve a particular conflict or difficulty
  - to review its ways of operating and relating
  - to carry out a planning or strategy process
- *Team Process Consultancy*: a form of team facilitation where the team consultant, sits alongside the team carrying out its meetings or planning sessions and provides reflection and review on 'how' the team is going about its task (Hawkins, 2017b, p. 71 -73).

All of the above interventions are useful and may prepare the team for future coaching.

Further evidence that a team may be ready to test if they're ready for coaching include:

- Team leader is emotionally intelligent
- Team members can actively engage in open, useful dialogue which ultimately move them forward in understanding, decision making and/or outcome
- Team members listen well
- Conflict can be facilitated with care
- Culture encourages safe to fail experimentation, active learning and is generally resilient

This list may sound as if the team has finished their team coaching. This is not the case. In fact, these are the optimal conditions for team coaching to commence. At least 3 out of the 5 must exist or the team may be in need of one of the other interventions listed above.

*Question 3: Is the team coach appropriate and skilled for the requirements?*

For team coaching to be an organizational staple, team coaches will require:

- High emotional intelligence and self-actualization
- Strong reflective practice, including coaching supervision;
- Holding multiple perspectives of the team, the system and themselves in the moment
- A wide range of interventions and an eclectic toolkit, including a strong background in multiple disciplines in working with groups
- The ability to work with another team coach and the team – more to follow below.
- Experience and wisdom to let team to work on issues themselves and leave the engagement when the team is coaching itself

*Question 4: What are the best practices for our organization's team coaching?*

Once you've established that the team is ready to be coached and the coach has the capability and capacity to work with the team, planning for what constitutes 'best practice' is the next step. Some key elements for consideration:

- Agree that the client is the team – not individual team members, not the client sponsor and/or the most senior person or who holds most power on the team.

- The work of the team is whatever is happening in the room with the team in the moment.
- Two coaches in the session: one as observer and the other as team coach. One coach could potentially be an internal, though preferable to have both be external to avoid groupthink and power dynamics.
- Contract often about shared objectives for the session, the overall goal and/or when there is conflict.
- Regular professional supervision with a qualified coaching supervisor who has group and/or team coaching experience. This also includes reflective practice for both team coaches to specifically look at the impact of the coaching. The supervisor will act as an external to the system and can signpost challenges that they see in the system, support the coach staying neutral and being a significant part of the learning ecosystem. Even as an external coach, you are part of the system when you're with the team.
- Pacing the coach(as) and team members: Take breaks often, drink plenty of water and allow for reflection about what's being learned.

As you can see, team coaching requires a radical shift in thinking. Coaching a group or team is not the same as one-to-one coaching. If either the coach or the team aren't prepared for the task of team coaching, this can be a significant setback in the team and more importantly the organizational growth. However, team coaching done well can be a significant contribution to the long-term success of creating a learning organization.

## Conclusion

Bringing people together to learn together is pivotal to organization efficacy and resilience. Drawing upon methodologies and techniques gathered over the last 100 years from reflective practice, group process and systems, adult learning, coaching and the concepts from double and triple loop learning and teaming, create the scaffolding of team coaching methodology. Given the breadth and depth of possible methodologies, inconsistent norms and standards as well as the complexity and emergent nature of team coaching, dialoguing about what we are learning can better define and measure team coaching. To answer the question posed by this chapter – perhaps “team coaching” as a label is a passing trend,

whereas learning together to co-create a shared outcome is fundamental for the success of any organization.

Team coaching could become the framework where team coaches, leaders and organizations learn from each other and we can be the disruptors needed in the coaching industry. As a result, organizations of the future could create a new societal frontier where leaders sit around the metaphorical campfire under the stars, have the honest conversations, make decisions about what lay ahead and brings people together who learn together. I wonder what we will call this future activity? Time will tell.

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