Team Coaching Practitioner

SESSION 5 WORKBOOK: PLANNING AND THE FIRST SESSION

Coaching and Mentoring International

TURNER INTERNATIONAL

Contents

Team coaching conversations template

The team coaching session tends to follow a clear structure. One that provides consistent and thoroughness is described in the nine steps below:

1. Contracting for the session: what responsibilities do we have to each other?
2. Overarching goal: How does this issue fit with our team mission or purpose?
3. Define the issue. Why is it important now?
4. Context: Understand the system(s)
5. Redefinition: How has our understanding of the issue changed?
6. Seeking individual and collective mindshift: What do we need to let go of and embrace?
7. Alternative ways forward: What [additional] options do we have?
8. Decisions: Including deciding not to decide
9. Re-contracting: What has changed in our understanding of how we need to work together on this issue? How will we keep on top of this issue in the future?

How would manage each of these stages to move the session on from one stage to the next?

Stage	How you would manage it	How you would move it on
Contracting for the session		
Overarching goal		

Define the issue		
Context		
Redefinition		
Seeking individual and collective mindshift		

Alternative ways forward		
Decisions		
Re-contracting		

Team coaching process framework

Step	Team coach's action	Team's action
1. Preparation	Establish what performance means in this context Establish how ready the team is for coaching	Consider willingness and readiness for coaching
2. Scoping and contracting	Clarify goals and timescales How will we measure the outcomes of coaching?	Understand and commit to specific performance goals – task, learning and behaviour
3. Process skills development	Help the team acquire basic skills of learning dialogue	Commit to and practice skills of learning dialogue
4. Coaching conversations	Lead the coaching dialogue	Create reflective space – calm time for coaching dialogue and for subsequent reflection
5. Process review	Briefly review coaching process at end of each session Review in more depth every third session	Give open feedback about the coaching process, and think about how could they make it more effective
6. Process transfer	Assist team to take more leadership of coaching conversation	Take more leadership of coaching conversation
7. Outcomes review	Assist team to evaluate what has been achieved through coaching Give feedback on team's presentation to more senior management	Take responsibility for the outcomes of coaching and reporting them back to more senior management.

Key steps of (first) team coaching sessions

Step	Purpose	What's required?
1. Contracting	Defining responsibilities we have to each other to achieve our outcomes. To set the environment	
2. Overarching goal	Core purpose/ being a team etc	
3. Define the issue	Help the team understand what's required now.	
4. Redefinition	Capturing any new insights, awareness and/or learning the team has around their issue.	
5. Seeking individual and collective mindshift	Capturing any new insights, awareness and/or learning the team has around themselves.	
6. Alternative ways forward	Designing small experiments, new ways of working or relating to each other and with others external to the team.	
7. Decisions – including deciding not to decide	Agreeing what needs to be decided, how to decide, who needs to be involved or not to decide and why.	
8. Re-contracting	To ensure the original agreement stays fresh and purposeful. Can be done at anytime.	

Team development plan

Clarify what the team is there for (its purpose)
Clarify the knowledge, skills and other competences required to deliver the purpose
Agree what capabilities are needed, when and where
Incorporated these into personal development plans
Everyone shares their full personal development plan
Collective responsibility for the learning that needs to take place
Regularly review the team development plan

Team resilience questionnaire

Score each item from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree)

	Score
1. We tend to focus on opportunities rather than threats	
2. When we don't win, it just confirms how tough things are	
3. We are generally positive about our future	
4. We tend to dwell on our past failures	
5. When things don't work out as planned, we view it as a learning experience	
6. We can let setbacks make us more risk averse	
7. We have strong confidence in our ability to deal with the unexpected	
8. We are not as well-equipped as we should be to handle disruptive change	
6. We can let setbacks make us more risk averse	
7. We have strong confidence in our ability to deal with the unexpected	
8. We are not as well-equipped as we should be to handle disruptive change	
9. We trust each other's ability to respond to new challenges	
10. We lack collective self-confidence	
11. We are very good at what we do	
12. We aren't proud enough of our accomplishments	
13. We are very clear about what is and isn't important	
14. We can easily get distracted from our core goals	
15. When things get tough, we get focused	
16. When things get tough, we have a tendency to bury our heads in the sand and focus on tasks that are familiar and comfortable	
17. We are good at putting problems into perspective	
18. We tend to be wary of disruptive change	
19. We are good at stepping back from a problem and seeing it from different perspectives	
20. We instinctively try to solve new problems using what worked before	
21. We typically generate and evaluate lots of options for tackling new challenges	
22. We tend to be "stuck in tramlines" when we tackle difficult problems	
23. We invite people with different perspectives and expertise to help us think through challenges	
24. We have a strong respect for tradition and precedent	
25. We each have the courage to ask for help, even though it means we have to admit our own weaknesses	
26. It can be dangerous in this team to be seen as a weak link	
27. We always feel able to call on team colleagues for support and help	
28. We tend to focus on problems that affect our own area of responsibility more than those that are a collective responsibility for the team	

29. We have a wide network of support we can call upon from outside the team	
30. It can feel lonely working in this team	
31. When we meet with setbacks, we quickly start to plan together how we should respond	
32. When we meet with setbacks, we tend to make panic decisions	
33. We communicate and coordinate even more intensively when we have a setback to deal with	
34. We feel better when we do something, even though it's not necessarily the right thing	
35. We have clear procedures, roles and structures to deal with the unexpected	
36. We tend to focus on the immediate problem, with little real attention to longer term implications	
37. We have a strong radar for future opportunities and challenges	
38. We see innovation as risky	
39. We are very open to experiment and to stopping experiments when they don't work	
40. We like to be sure of the direction of change, before we invest in preparing for it	
41. If disruptive change affects our competitors as well, we know we can turn this to advantage	
42. I can think of at least three things, on which this team is currently procrastinating	
TOTAL	

Add all the scores for the odd number questions and all the scores for the even number questions. If you have a high level of team resilience, your odd number total will be at least twice your even number total.

Virtual team coaching

As team coaches increasingly work with virtual teams or with teams online, an increasing proportion of the issues brought to supervision address how to do this most effectively. The following guidelines capture some of the key learning.

The discovery phase

The discovery phase is not just about building the coach's understanding of the team. It is equally about the team understanding itself. Key components here include:

- Individual online interviews with all team members, the team leader and key stakeholders – at least 30 minutes (at least 60 minutes for the leader). Create a short video to introduce yourself and the reason for the interview ahead oi time.
- Observing a team meeting
- Feedback on the virtual meeting. (This should be as non-judgemental as possible, covering, for example, how much airtime each member had. You may wish to give the team a checklist of things you will be looking for and ask them to complete a questionnaire at the end of the meeting, for them to assess the meeting against.)

Contracting with the team leader

Spend at least an hour planning the first team coaching session with them. Be very clear about the expected learning outcomes from the session … "within these 90 minutes, we want to have a clear understanding of our choices on…

Preparation for the first coaching session

Virtual team coaching sessions have less scope for experiment in the moment (it takes longer to gain everyone's assent), so often need more structure. You can create more space for experiment and following unscripted paths by shifting as much of the work as possible to the pre-workshop preparation. For example, if you use a diagnostic questionnaire, distribute the collective analysis and a list of questions to reflect upon. Split the team into co-coaching pairs or trios to delve into issues, ready for collation and deeper dialogue in the team coaching session.

Working between sessions

Encourage the team to set up subgroups to explore in more depth issues that arise. Be available to assist these groups, if they request it.

Groundrules

Establish clear groundrules to ensure everyone is fully attentive and participating. You can suggest groundrules to them, or ask them to create their own, or both. Or you can start by asking them what rules they already have for their virtual meetings.

Rules might include:

- Choose a place where there is no background noise, such as wind or traffic
- How they ensure everyone is heard
- How to raise hands
- Fairness in scheduling, so that the same people don't always have to attend in the middle of their night.

Plus, of course, all the general rules about respect and co-learning.

Technical issues

A lot depends on the technology platform you use. Ideally work with one that lets you use break out rooms and see the whole team in gallery view. It is very hard to observe the team if you can only see some of them at one time. (In many systems that have gallery view, the people you see are the three or four, who most recently spoke up – so the less vocal members may be out of your view.) In theory, Zoom can put 49 people on screen simultaneously, but this doesn't work with all computers and the thumbnail pictures may be too small to observe emotional clues. This is an argument for ensuring the size of the team is not too large. As a general rule, the limit on numbers is roughly:

- Team coaching or facilitation — 8 to 12 people max
- Training — 30 – 40 max
- Informational presentations — unlimited

Familiarise yourself with the technology of whiteboards, breakout rooms and so on. But don't get carried away with these tools. For example, while polls can enliven a presentation and promote audience participation, they have much more limited use in team coaching. A "show of hands" in the chat box is faster!

Always have a back-up solution in case the technology fails – for example, a telephone dial in if there are bandwidth problems.

Consider linking several online tools, which can support the online conversation – for example, Slack or Trello. Use screen sharing to engage everyone with these. Some teams benefit from having a private LinkedIn group, where they continue conversations and where they may ask you for advice or direction.

The preparation stage

Readiness for coaching

Thinking of a team you are familiar with, complete the questionnaire below. What do the scores tell you?

Consider how you might use this with a team:

- Would you ask them to complete the questionnaire as it is?
- Adapt it (if so how)?
- Discuss the questions in open forum?
- Work through the questions in one-to-one interviews?
- Not use it at all?

How ready is this team for coaching?

1. Do the team members have positive experience and expectations of coaching?
2. Does the team see team coaching as both urgent and important?
3. Does the team have an appropriate mix of complementary skills, relevant to its expected outcomes?
4. Are the team members genuinely committed to becoming a high performing team?
5. Are the team members – including the leader -- committed to open and honest dialogue?
6. Are they – including the leader – willing to challenge themselves and each other?
7. Are the team leader's motivations for introducing team coaching transparent and accepted by the team members?
8. Is it clear who is in the team and why?
9. Is team membership likely to change during the period of the team coaching?
10. Is the team willing to address and review its purpose and priorities?
11. Do team members genuinely want to collaborate rather than work in silos?
12. Does the team meet at least monthly?
13. Do team members accept responsibility for their own and their colleagues' learning and development?
14. Is the team adequately resourced (in terms of money, time, information, etc) to achieve its goals?
15. Is the team prepared to invest time into coaching sessions and into implementing necessary changes?
16. Is the team willing to address internal conflict?
17. Is the team prepared to address poor performance by individual members?
18. Is the team manager prepared to undertake personal change, to better support team performance?
19. Is team coaching supported by key stakeholders outside the team?
20. Are there any other significant barriers to making team coaching work?

Score 1 (Strongly no) to 5 (strongly yes)

Your thoughts

What does performance mean for this team?

Consider the following questions in the context of a team you are familiar with and try to answer them as honestly as possible. Consider also What evidence do we have to answer this?

- Do we know who our customers are? (Internal and external)
- Do we know what they want and need from us? (And do they know?)
- What's the quality of what we deliver? (Is it what they want/ need?)
- What reputation/ brand do we have with them?
- What do we do now that reinforces or undermines our reputation/ the quality of our work?
- Do we know specifically what needs to improve and how?
- Do we know what we are going to do to deliver those improvements?
    - Resources
    - Skills + competencies
    - Processes
    - Communication
    - Behaviours
- How will we know if we've succeeded or failed?
- Do we understand the difference between efficiency and effectiveness? (What are we doing efficiently that is hindering our performance?)
- Are we clear about which influences on our performance are within our control / influence; and which are not? How can we move the latter, so we can influence them?
- What have we not considered that might affect our performance next year?

Another approach is to ask the team: What are the five or six things this team has to do really well, to achieve its mission (as defined in Hawkins' model of team performance – see page 33). Ask team members to write their lists individually, then share them. Your role as a team coach is to help them come to a consensus about what the priorities are and how they relate to the mission.
What range of responses would you expect from a team, with which you are familiar?

Your thoughts

How would you help the team come to a consensus?

Your thoughts

In what other ways would you prepare yourself and the team for team coaching?

Your thoughts

Setting goals with teams

The critical starting point is "What is the team's purpose?". Once that is defined, the coach can facilitate them in discussing "What are the five (or 7 or whatever) key things that have to happen to achieve that purpose?"

Once these are agreed, you can start to define collective goals -- long term, medium term and short term. "What would have happened for us to be sure we are making progress towards achieving those things?" And "What measures would be appropriate?"

Next, ask people to co-coach each other on what they expect of themselves and of each other in terms of making these goals happen -- again long, medium and short-term. From this, everyone agrees two or three (maximum) goals for themselves.

Finally and very important, everyone agrees to support each other in achieving their goals and discusses how they will do so.

At subsequent meetings, the agenda is:

- What progress are we making towards our goals?
- Which if any of our goals need to be revisited?
- What have we done to advance the achievement of our own goals, each other's goals and the collective goals?

Team coaching goals come about from two routes: in the short-term from needs to tackle specific performance issues, and in the longer term from a team development plan. Together, these approaches tackle the three foci of team competence: task (performance) focus, behavioural focus and learning focus.

Short-term performance goals

To establish performance goals, you can consider the following questions:

- How clear are we about our mission?
- What are the five key things this team has to deliver? For whom?
- How do we know how well we are delivering these? (What feedback are we getting and from whom?)
- What performance gaps do we see?
- What systems do we need to improve?
- What additional resources do we need?
- What behaviours are hindering our performance?

The team development plan

The team development plan defines what the team and its individual members need and want to learn, how this will contribute to the business purpose and the responsibilities that each team member holds to the others in helping achieve the learning goals. It underpins task targets and goals with practical ways of developing capability and capacity. It also helps to align individual career aspirations with developmental opportunities within the team.
To create a team development plan you will need to:

- Ensure that everyone starts with a personal development plan
- Identify the key skills, knowledge and capabilities the team will need to have to meet

the challenges of the next 3, 6, 12 and 24 months
- Identify any collective gaps (where the team as a whole lacks this competence or needs to improve it)
- Identify any further individual development needs
- Assign roles and responsibilities for:
- Acquiring new knowledge and bringing it into the team
- Coaching team colleagues
- Engaging with external resources to guarantee access to expertise that can't easily be developed within the team in the time available
- Establish how to monitor and evaluate progress against the team development plan
- Ensure that progress is reviewed regularly

The team should review the plan quarterly to make changes in the light of new circumstances and needs.

@David Clutterbuck, 2020.

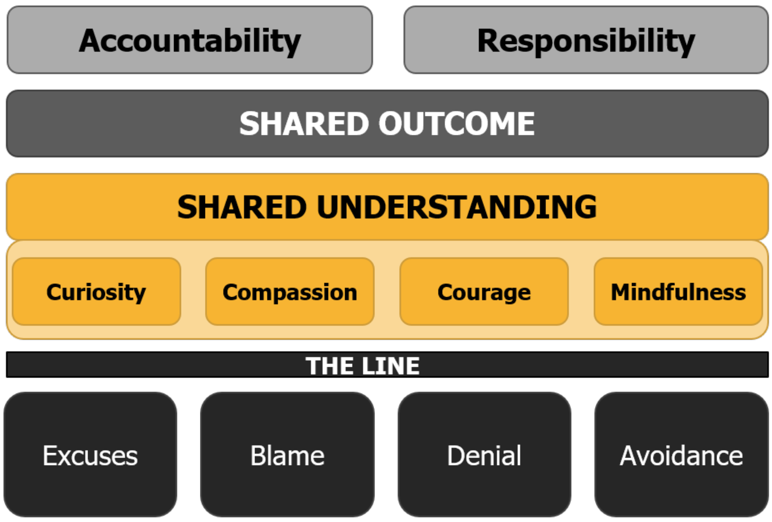
The importance of contracting

Using the Shared Outcome Model

One of the key reasons any agreement fails is because something has not been contracted properly. Contracting is a dialogue that establishes and sustains the relationship, creates healthy boundaries and invites parties to participate in a co-created manner. Contracting is an essential skill that invites and encourages people to stay in the here-and-now and take responsibility for their own actions (Hay, 2007). Psychological contracts underpin signed paper 'Contracts' or verbal agreements.

Contracting is important at the beginning of any relationship to set out the terms of engagement - it creates the 'Contract', an agreement between parties (Turner, Lucas & Whitaker, 2018). It serves as the initial agreement that creates the way in which parties work together and divide responsibilities. As time progresses and the parties better understand the context of the agreement or Contract, they can then re-contract more suitable terms. Understanding the psychological contract underpins successful relationships, regardless of the context.

Assumptions and lack of clarity as time goes by can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding, creating 'below the line' behaviour, as illustrated in Turner's Shared Outcome model:



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As the model highlights, the purpose of the Contract is to gain a shared outcome for all parties involved and create a shared understanding of who has the Accountability and Responsibility for the shared outcome from the conversation/meeting/session/elements of an engagement. Consciously applying 'above the line' behaviours creates psychological safety - a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes (Edmondson, A.C. Teaming: How Organisations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy, 2012).

When a pair, team or group is actively engaged in gaining a shared understanding, curiosity, compassion, courage and mindfulness foster psychological safety. Conversely psychological safety can be jeopardised when the 'below the line' fear-based behaviours of Blame, Denial, Excuses and/or Avoidance are present.

The psychological contract is understood and the terms and conditions in a Contract are agreed through the lens of each person's own assumptions, values, beliefs and expectations. This in turn creates the paradigm of how we behave and work together. Consequently, regardless whether consciously or unconsciously, the psychological contract is created using either 'above the line' constructive behaviours or 'below the line' fear-based behaviours in how working together evolves.

Elements of Psychological Contracts

Psychological contracts underpin all working relationships - one-to-one, group, team and organisational. They contain the conscious and unconscious agreements in how we communicate, share work, make meaning and get things done. Psychological contracts are the expectations and assumptions that one person holds of another. All parties in the shared agreement participate in governing the rules and procedures that guide these psychological and/or actual signed contracts.

Written or verbal Contracts attempt to clearly define the contractual terms. However, it is the lens in which the parties view the agreed terms of the Contract that adds real meaning to it. Each person signing up to the terms of the contract brings their own assumptions, beliefs and expectations; most of which will be unspoken and/or unknown at the time they agreed. It is this unconscious part of agreements or Contracts which creates the complexity. The agreement or Contract is better understood as time progresses and actual work is undertaken, where people become clearer about what they actually agreed to contribute to. The current circumstances and access to more information or experience creates a more defined understanding of the agreement or Contract.

As a coach or coaching leader, you already have the skills to apply to contracting. Simply asking exploratory questions without knowing the answer, sharing your thoughts and feelings transparently during a dialogue is contracting. The cornerstone of individual coaching is building rapport and trust, which is fundamental in contracting.

Despite this complexity, starting out with a well-constructed shared outcome, agreement or Contract that clearly defines roles, responsibilities, costs and limitations sets the foundation for co-working.

During contracting a pair, group or team may explore:

- an exchange - What will we do for each other?
- a sense of reciprocity - What give and get elements are important to parties?
- choice - How do I or we freely enter this arrangement?
- a sense of predictability - How can we ensure everyone involved has some guarantees of what will happen?
- a future direction - What will we do?
- defined responsibilities of parties concerned - If I will be accountable for doing X will you be accountable for doing Y? (Carroll, M. & Gilbert, M.C., 2011)

By their very nature, psychological contracts 'seal the deal' between parties and set up a cascade of behaviour in how they interact with each other.

Striking the Initial Contract or Agreement

In a group or team context, respect is a core element. Working collaboratively and having clarity about what suits can be renegotiated (re-contracted) at any time. More than likely you and your client(s) or team members will not cover all the issues that may be important at the outset of working together. As issues arise in the moment, re-contracting is a way of checking in with people about what to do with this new information and what next steps can be taken. It can be useful when a previous agreement has been broken, such as a pattern of arriving late, missing deadlines or re-negotiating responsibilities when workloads are better understood.

Introducing the Shared Outcome model strikes the initial agreement or Contract. Having an initial shared understanding ensures parties are on the same page. Once all parties have been heard and have shared their understanding of the problem, project or situation, then and only then it is possible to move to shared outcomes, responsibilities and accountability. At any contracting stage, if someone has been triggered and below the line behaviours arise, this creates the opportunity pause, to engage the person or people to voice their perspective and better understand the context. This does not mean consensus, it means a collective understanding of the opportunities, perspectives and/or potential pitfalls.

Deliberately using the Shared Outcome model for contracting, the situation becomes framed from an 'above the line' perspective, free from blame or excuses. When difficulties arise, returning to shared understanding, engaging around issues and re-contracting anything that was previously unclear can save time in the long run. Re-contracting takes courage and encourages all parties to share their experiences and collectively stay 'above the line'. With the agreed shared outcome in mind, the parties can redefine accountability, responsibility and/or ownership to suit the current circumstances. Engaging in re-contracting requires a clear perspective.

When engaging in a re-contracting dialogue, take a deep breath and speak authentically. Then try the following:

- "I'm curious about your interpretation of the shared outcome. What's missing/different/unique for you?"
- "I noticed…" (e.g. You have been late and unprepared for the last two sessions, is this time still working for you?)
- "Can you tell me more about…" (e.g. How we can work together more efficiently to stay focused?)
- "What was going on for you when…" (e.g. The conversation suddenly stalled?)
- "Can you please share your perspective…." (e.g. about the impact on this decision with your team?)
- "This works for me; how can we make this work for you too?"

As a coach you know using open-ended questions can lead to new possibilities and ways of relating in a constructive 'above the line' way. Knowing when and how to re-contract gives all parties the opportunity to more easily get back on track to the shared outcome, minimising risk and increasing both your success and sense of satisfaction in achieving a shared outcome. If you are finding engaging others difficult, learning the art of contracting can be done with the support of a coaching supervisor.

Using Contracting to Define Working Together

Contracting can be used at any juncture of a project, program, engagement or at meetings. Here are some areas where you could use the Shared Outcomes and apply contracting:

- to understand the objectives of the engagement, project, program or meeting
- to clarify roles, outline guidelines and define responsibilities
- to ensure measurable outcomes or milestones
- to explore and discuss assumptions and biases
- to establish opportunities to re-contract if things don't go as expected
- to define confidentiality and other boundaries
- to prevent misunderstandings and build a sustainable relationship

Spending time in the initial stages of the relationship and re-contracting throughout highlights:

- Learning opportunities
- Blocked emotions or energy in the individual, group, team and/or system
- Unspoken assumptions
- Processing new information
- Opportunities for feedback
- 'Teaming' – all parties working toward a shared outcome

Considering the sorts of items that need to be discussed is unique for each contracting opportunity. If you are new to contracting, spending some time preparing a few conversational questions or topic areas may be useful. For example, within an individual coaching engagement, confidentiality is a common area to begin the Contract. Contexts which relate to the client and their boss, the organization, their personal life, their health, human resources, the recruitment agency, etc. illustrate striking a basic Contract.

Given each client's circumstances and the variations on the engagement, you may want to start with some basics about what they understand is meant by confidentiality, compare your understanding and share your experience about what has worked with other clients.

- What confidential issues is the individual concerned about 'getting out' or not 'getting out' to others?
- Who are people they want to know or don't want to know about what happens in the coaching? Why?
- What sort of things do they want included or excluded in the progress reports?
- What happens when they hear rumors about what's happening in the coaching? (from HR, their boss, colleagues, family members, etc.)

Other questions that might appear in contracting conversations, regardless of context:

- When, where and how often will we meet?
- Who will take notes? Will this person maintain the role? Where will the notes be stored?

- Can the session or meeting be recorded or videoed? Where will the recording be stored? Who can access it? How long will it be saved?
- What happens if someone is late? What are the procedures for cancellation and rescheduling?
- How do we measure success? How do we celebrate success?
- What happens when things go ‘off track’?
- What suits individuals in when, where and how often they meet?
- What unique strengths do individuals bring?

If it is an individual coaching engagement:

- Has the client had coaching before?
- If so, what did they like and dislike about it? What did they learn?
- If not, what do they imagine coaching is about?
- How do you as a coach like to work and what do you bring to the coaching relationship?
- What tools, methodologies and training do you use that create the experience for the client?
- What reflective practice do you regularly use?
- Do you have professional supervision?
- What current learning do you bring to the relationship?

If it is a team context or coaching engagement:

- How will members collectively stay on-track?
- How will members communicate in between meetings or sessions?
- How will members inform absentees when they miss a meeting or session?
- How will members inform the coach(es) about what has happened between sessions?
- What questions are useful to generate interest and get a shared agreement?

The possibilities are endless. Remaining curious, attentively listening and actively including both the individual(s) as well as yourself (you are also part of the system!) are the key elements to ensure contracting happens and is successful.

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Communication and the psychological contract

Abstract
Making the psychological contract a practical construct for organisations in managing relationships with stakeholders demands a simple but accurate model of the perceptual dynamics. The model presented here is based upon three meanings of the term value – value as worth, as respect and as beliefs. Aligning the perceptions of employees and the organisation on the nature of the value exchange provides a basis for measuring the quality or "perceived fairness" of the psychological contract in action. The same principle applies to the psychological contract with all other stakeholder groups.

Keywords: Psychological contract; stakeholder; values; social exchange

Maintaining the goodwill of key stakeholder groups – employees, customers, investors and suppliers, in particular – depends to a significant extent on how the relationships between them and an organisation is perceived. The quality of communication between the organisation and each stakeholder group is a factor (possibly the most important factor) in that perception. It works both ways. If the organisation views its customers positively, for example, they are more likely to respond in kind. Positive expectations on the part of customers influence employees to respond enthusiastically and with genuine interest. On the other hand, a negative perception stimulates a negative cycle. Critical to this perceptual dynamic is how people feel about the nature of the exchange between themselves and the organisation. Is it fair? Does it match with what they feel is right? Is it enhancing or demeaning for them? The common term for how people feel about this exchange is the psychological contract.

The psychological contract is one of those largely abstract terms that pundits like to trot out whenever they want to refer vaguely to relationships between employers and their employees. Pinning it down is very difficult, but a number of academic studies (Guest and Conway, 2002; Kessler and Undy, 1996; Makin 1996) have shown that it is both a real and a useful concept in managing employee alignment and addressing issues such as motivation, retention, productivity and indeed, the quality of communication itself. What people hear when the organisation sends out messages is modified by the filters they apply and these filters are to a significant extent influenced by the nature and the health of the psychological contract between each individual and the organisation, and between groups of employees and the organisation. What people are prepared to say is also influenced by the psychological contract. Where the contract is healthy, people are more likely to speak openly, to challenge poor practice and to take responsibility for helping to fix things they criticise.

So what exactly is the psychological contract? At its simplest and most easily applied to the practical world of day to day management, it is the unwritten assumptions by employers and employees about the appropriateness and value of the social exchange between them. There have been many attempts to quantify this, but trial and error has brought us to a simple, workable model built around the concept of value. The stronger the employer and the employee value the relationship between them, and the more positively both parties perceive that that value is being maintained and enhanced, the healthier is the psychological contract. In this model (see Figure 1), value has three core meanings:

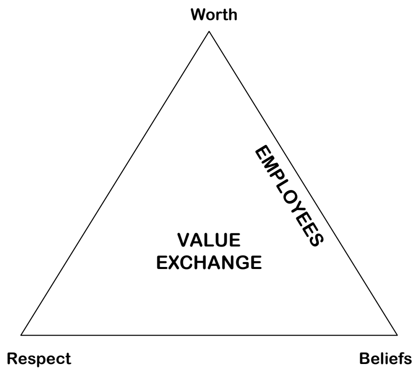
Value as worth refers to how each side creates added value for the other. For example, while the employee adds value to shareholders in the form of dividends and share price or other forms of capital appreciation, the company promises a decent salary, a pension and – often most important – an opportunity to gain skills and track record that will give the employee greater earning power, should they move on. A sense of equity is also important here – do employees feel that the reward system is fair?

Value as respect refers to how the employees feel about the organisation and how they feel the organisation regards them. How much pride does the employee feel working in this organisation? Is it an important part of their self-esteem? Do they feel that their contribution is recognised and seen as important by peers, superiors and customers? Is recognition perceived as merit based or on factors, such as who shouts loudest? All these add up to a sense of being valued.

Values as beliefs relates to the degree of alignment employees feel between the values they hold (about such things as honesty, how people are treated and social responsibility). Problems occur when people feel they are asked to leave their external values at the door when they come to work; or when they observe major differences between the values an organisation espouses and what it does in practice.

Figure 1: The value of values

FIGURE 1



Critical assumptions

Implicit in the concept of the psychological contract are the critical assumptions that shape our perceptions of appropriateness and value. Critical assumptions vary from individual to individual and group to group. They are composed of beliefs, which may or may not have a solid grounding in reality, but which have a strong influence on attitudes and behaviours. Typical critical assumptions might include:

- It's not safe in this company to let it be known that you are looking for another job. (Only one in five people, on average, look openly inside their current employer for a job in another department.)
- It's OK to make mistakes here, as long as you learn from them

- People here get promoted for hitting the numbers, not for developing others
- The top managers here are just interested in lining their own pockets
- It's a waste of time complaining about conditions – it just gets lost in the bureaucracy
- Top management know what they are doing and why

Many of these critical assumptions are explored in well-designed employee alignment surveys or broader organisational climate surveys, but it is important to recognise that people not only have different assumptions on each issue, but that the relative importance of each issue to each individual may also be very different. So the way they apply their individual filters to communication is likely to differ, as well.

To understand the psychological contract in an organisation, it is essential to recognise and define the critical assumptions that people apply to each of the three areas of social exchange. Interviews with focus groups are the obvious and simplest way of gathering this data. Questionnaires are too likely to elicit responses to the issues you expect and to miss the unexpected but genuinely critical.

Some of the key questions with regard to the worth exchange include:

- How do you see the balance between what you contribute and what you could contribute?
- Would you like to contribute more? If so, what's preventing you?
- Which of those factors do you have control of and which are out of your control?
- Do you feel the company rewards you appropriately for what you do?
- Is the reward system fair? Is it clear why some people get promoted/ get good bonuses and others don't? Do you know what you have to do to progress in this organisation?
- Do you receive the level of help and support from the organisation, from your boss and from your peers, that you need to grow in skills, knowledge and performance?
- Do you see a clear relationship between your investment in your own development and the opportunities open to you (in this organisation or elsewhere)?
- Is the work that you do sufficiently stretching to help you build competence and track record?
- Do you think that the profits created by the organisation (if a private sector company) are appropriately distributed between employees, pensioners, top management and investors?
- What would you wish the worth exchange between you and the organisation to be like?

Questions for investigating the respect dimension of the psychological contract include:

- Do you feel that you are recognised for what you do? All the time, or just sometimes?
- Are your ideas listened to?
- Do you respect your boss and do you think s/he respects you?
- Do you think top management genuinely care about you? About your colleagues? About the community, in which it operates?
- Are you proud of the work you do and the organisation you work for? Do you feel it makes a major contribution to society?
- Would you encourage your friends to work here?
- Are people able to give and receive open feedback to each other, without fear or embarrassment?

- Is diversity genuinely valued or simply tolerated?
- If you put forward viewpoints at odds with mainstream thinking, will this have negative effects on your relationships with others in the organisation or on your career?
- Are your successes celebrated by the team?
- Does the organisation respect and try to accommodate your needs for work-life balance? Do you in return feel positive about having to work extra hours/ give extra effort to meet an urgent customer need or deliver an internal company project?
- What does your gut instinct tell you about how well you personally are valued by peers, managers and customers?

Questions for investigating the beliefs dimension of the psychological contract include:
- When you come to work, do you feel you have to modify or compromise on principles you'd apply in other parts of your life?
- Do you feel you and your colleagues have an opportunity to influence the beliefs and values of the organisation?
- Do you know what ethical values the company aspires to?
- Do you think that the leaders genuinely try to live up to those values?
- Is the overall culture supportive of those values? Your immediate manager?
- What would happen if you pointed out a serious disparity between the espoused values and what actually occurs?
- Do you feel the company is honest and fair towards customers and other shareholders?
- Have you ever considered resigning from this organisation on a point of principle?
- What's your view of a responsible employer?

There are also generic questions that help to build a picture of the psychological contract. Among them:
- What is it that makes you stay with this organisation?
- What would make you think about leaving? (On average, one in three employees of large companies is minded to move on, if the right job opportunity presents itself.)
- What's most important to you in assessing your relationship with an employer: money, potential to progress, how you are treated (respected), how comfortable you feel with the prevailing values/ beliefs?

Strengthening the psychological contract

Before you can strengthen the psychological contract, you have to measure it in a way that allows for a variety of demographic analyses. There will almost certainly be significant differences in critical assumptions – and therefore in perception of the contract – between people from different age groups, different levels of education, and different cultures. But the demographics are unlikely to be that clear cut. Understanding the broad filters each group is applying is essential in designing appropriate responses to those aspects of the contract, about which they feel most negative.

It's important to recognise the interdependence of the three dimensions of value. One company carried out an employee opinion survey and found that pay was a major issue for many people and a significant reason for turnover amongst the key employees. Yet when it increased pay to the upper quartile for the sector, turnover rapidly increased. The reason was that it was a lot easier in the restrictive culture of this organisation to complain about something tangible, such as pay, than to surface concerns about respect and alignment of beliefs. When talented employees started earning better money, they set their sights higher and looked for jobs that were more fulfilling on all three dimensions. Only when the organisation began to consult with employees and tackle these other issues, did it halt and reverse the talent drain.

It seems obvious that employees should be deeply involved in dialogue about the psychological contract and in the management of it. But many companies avoid this level of engagement for fear of stirring up hidden concerns, which would then need to be addressed. The more open the measurement process and the subsequent review of its findings, the more potential there is for finding innovative solutions to factors that undermine the psychological contract. Promoting effective dialogue also has the benefit that it is not just the organisation, which undergoes change. It becomes a great deal easier to challenge and turn around negative and inaccurate critical assumptions, if people can discuss them openly and experience the views of others, who are working from different assumptions and perceptions. That's not to say that everyone will be converted, but mutual understanding is a much firmer base for building a healthy psychological contract than mutual suspicion.

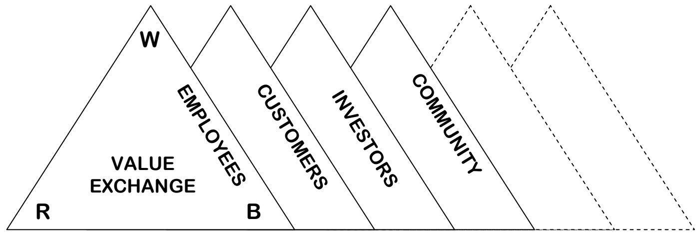
It's usually best to use expert facilitation in managing these discussions initially, but our experience is that people can be trained quite quickly to manage this kind of dialogue within the team for themselves. As long as the organisation has a process for collating issues that come from such team dialogue, it can keep a constant monitor on the psychological contract and engage employees in managing the micro-adjustments that may be needed from time to time. Many of these adjustments may not need to ascend beyond the team, however. In one team of 12, a radical improvement in the psychological contract was achieved simply by reviewing their responsibilities for supporting each other's learning and development and by being explicit about what the team needed from its manager. The more the psychological contract can be managed at the team level, the less need for major, centralised adjustments.

The wider psychological contract

Almost all references to the psychological contract relate to the employer – employee relationship. Yet the same principles apply to relationships with all other significant stakeholders. Customers, for example, tend to feel greater loyalty to companies that they perceive offer them greater value for money, give them benefits beyond the transactional, have principles they feel comfortable with (ie who they feel they can trust) and treat them with respect. Investors make very similar calculations, as do the Press and even environmental groups, although the basis of the social exchange is often very different.

Figure 2: The chain of value exchange

FIGURE 2



What this means in practical terms is that it is now possible to compare shifts in the psychological contract among one group of stakeholders with those among another. If employees become dissatisfied with the respect exchange, for example, how long before that shows up in customer dissatisfaction, and how deep an impact will various levels of employee dissatisfaction create? In service businesses, in particular, being able to manage these issues on a frequent basis could make a major difference to profitability.

The business benefits of managing the psychological contract

Taking a more proactive approach to managing the psychological contract will, I am convinced, become a essential element in retaining and motivating talent – and hence an essential weapon in the talent war. The better we understand individual and group dissatisfactions with the psychological contract, the faster and more effectively we can address the issues. We have found that the values model provides a language and approach that the organisation, team leaders and individuals can all use to manage the multitude of individual psychological contracts; and that allows organisations to integrate policies, systems and culture change in addressing the quality of their relationships with employees. The ability to do this – consistently and at a human level as well as at an organisational level – may become a significant source of competitive advantage.

David Clutterbuck is visiting professor of management at Sheffield Hallam University and Oxford Brookes University. More detail on communication and the psychological contract can be found in his book Talking Business, co-authored with Sheila Hirst.

Useful reading

Guest, D and Conway, N (2002) *Pressure at work and the psychological contract* Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
Guest, D and Conway, N (2001) *Public and private sector perspectives on the psychological contract* Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
Kessler, I and Undy, R (1996) *The new employment relationship: examining the psychological contract* Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
Makin, P (1996) Organizations and the psychological contract: managing people at work, Greenwood Press, Conn 416pp

Ethics of using diagnostics

While it is generally agreed that psychometrics and other questionnaires that categorise or seek to "explain" aspects of people's personality should be applied ethically, what that means in practice is not consistent. The following are principles that we recommend. You may also want to refer to the codes of conduct of relevant professional bodies and to the information on the websites of the owners of diagnostics you apply.

- Be clear about the purpose of using the diagnostic and ensure that the client or team is also clear
- Explain to the client the theory behind the diagnostic and what this means in practice[1]
- Explain who will have access to the data and in what form (e.g. aggregate or individual)
- Ensure that all data is stored in accordance with GDPR requirements and disposed of within a defined period – and to inform clients of these procedures
- Comply with all intellectual property rights and licenses[2]
- Comply with any codes of practice from a relevant professional body
- To have a transparent approach to debriefing, agreed in advance with clients

Arguably the biggest ethical problem relating to psychometrics is leading the client to assume that they have now been "defined" – that their results describe who they are. In reality, of course, psychometrics simply tell you about how you see yourself now, rather than about your potential to grow. They can easily deter people from making the effort to achieve significant behavioural change. In addition, self-report is much less reliable than 360 data (although that also has problems). In using diagnostics, a primary ethical principle is to ensure the client understands the limitations of the instrument and the data from it.

In the context of team coaching, there are additional ethical considerations. Among them:

- People may feel very different about sharing personal data with their team colleagues; it is important that they feel safe in doing so
- If data is to be shared with the team leader before the rest of the team, this must be transparent and the reasons explained – generally, a dialogue with the team is advised
- It is common for diagnostic questionnaires to be repeated at intervals to measure changes – for example, increasing levels of psychological safety. It is important to discuss and agree beforehand how this data will be used and who it will be shared with.

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[1] A major issue here is evidence of test-retest validity. Millions of clients (and many coaches) have been duped into thinking instruments are much more reliable than is actually the case.

[2] Many psychometrics require anyone using them to have attended a qualifying course, for which they charge. While there are good arguments for this in terms of protecting clients, it is also a commercial requirement.

Additional reading

Team coaching: Improving the quality of meetings

Helping the team take greater responsibility for meeting effectiveness.

Roles of the team coach

- Observing and giving feedback on meeting dynamics
- Helping the team develop improved meeting processes
- Helping the team become more reflective and develop/ sustain more productive behaviours

The guidance below applies equally well to all kinds of team meetings, including leadership teams, and to Boards.

Observing and giving feedback on meeting dynamics
This is typically best done with two people: one focusing on processes; the other on behaviour. However, when there is only one observer, they must ensure they give an appropriate balance of their attention of each of these two meeting dynamics.

Some of the key things to look out for in this observation are:

Process

- Is there a clear agenda, distributed well in advance? Does the agenda reflect the relative importance of the issues discussed?
- Does everyone have the information to engage in an appropriate level of discussion? Is there information overload? (Are reports too long, confusing etc?)
- Is there a clear sense of purpose to the meeting, linked closely to a shared sense of purpose (and performance goals) for the team?
- Is there an appropriate balance between action-orientation, review/planning and reflection?
- Does the team make real, substantive decisions, with clear accountabilities?
- Is there an appropriate balance between orientation towards future, present and past (e.g. 5:2:1)
- Is there an appropriate balance between detail and conceptual discussion?
- Is there an appropriate balance between sticking to the agenda and ensuring that issues are properly explored?
- Is the team effective at 'parking' of important but potentially side-tracking issues?
- Is there an effective summary and review of learning at the end of each significant discussion?
- Is there an appropriate balance between new encouraging ideas and 'no surprises'?
- Does the chair manage the meeting effectively? (Do they rush through items to keep to the time? Do they control too much or too little?)
- How strategically focused were the conversations?
- Based on their contributions, is it clear why each of the people round the table is part of this meeting? How clear are they about what is expected of them and what they can usefully contribute?

Behaviour

- What behaviours do you feel contributed to and detracted from the effectiveness of the meeting?
- Are all discussions inclusive of all members (not dominated by one or two)? Were there occasions, when some members were side-lined in the conversations between the chair and a few individuals?
- Do team members feel able to comment and challenge outside of their specialist areas?
- Is there a sense of openness and trust?
- Is everyone fully present for the whole meeting?
- Is there sufficient constructive challenge (i.e. not destructive challenge or over-politeness)?
- Is there low level of personal politics inside the meeting?
- How does the team treat outsiders, who are invited to present to them? (Are they made to feel welcomed and valued?)

General

- What impressed you most / least about this team meeting?
- Would you have looked forward to the meetings of this team, if you were a member?

Improving meeting processes

The purpose of a meeting is either to:

- Inform
- Monitor and review
- Discuss and create new knowledge/ ideas
- Make decisions
- Build team cohesion and the behaviours that underlie it

For any potential agenda item, the team should consider:

- Is this truly a matter for the whole team, or just a few members?
- Do we actually need to meet? (E.g. can we inform each other with a short report?)
- Does it genuinely require discussion?
- How will this discussion contribute to team performance?

For the agenda as a whole, the team should have a clear process to decide:

- Who can put forward an item for inclusion
- Who decides what items are assessed for inclusion, and how

A simple, practical way to assess items is by assigning each a score of up to 10 points for both urgency and strategic importance. Multiplying these scores by each other gives an percentage ranking. Recommended good practice – in line with what we now know about how the executive function of the brain works – is to place the highest scoring items first on the agenda. Standard agenda items, such as Minutes of *the last meeting, Matters arising* and *Apologies for absence* are normally neither of high urgency or high strategic importance. These can often be relegated to pre-meeting information.

Managing frequency of issues

Another useful role for the team coach is to help the team identify those issues, which it needs to attend to, but which only tend to make the agenda when there is a problem. These might include the Team Development Plan, managing team reputation, stakeholder feedback, risk management and so on. The team can manage these issues more effectively by scheduling how frequently they appear on the meeting agenda and assigning clear responsibilities to one or more team members for producing a timely report and identifying / highlighting any decisions the team needs to make.

A useful blog on managing team meetings comes from Amy Gallo (HBR blog network, 13 December 2013), who offers 7 imperatives for keeping a meeting on track:

1. Make the purpose clear
2. Control the size
3. Set the tone (make sure people feel comfortable about contributing)
4. Manage ramblers
5. Control tangents
6. Make careful transitions (move on when people are ready)
7. End the meeting well

As a team coach, you can help the team devise its own rules for each of these imperatives (plus any others they suggest).

Reflection and behaviour in meetings

Effective teams have a clear sense of appropriate meeting behaviours, which they try to live up to. They also recognise that some decisions need much greater depth of conversation – because they have high significance for team performance, involve substantial risks, or where team members have substantially different, perhaps conflicting perspectives. For these topics, it is important to move beyond debate and discussion, to dialogue – a skill many teams lack. The team coach can help team members understand the difference between these three modes of conversation and where each is appropriate.

Team behaviours/ norms

Simply getting the team to identify behaviours that enhance and undermine the quality of dialogue is a useful starting point. From here, the team can agree the norms of meeting behaviour it wants, and how team members will challenge behaviour that does not meet these norms (including from the team leader).

Building the habit of reflection

For the "difficult" topics, a pragmatic but very effective approach is for the chairperson to ask everyone to take a few minutes before the topic is discussed, to write down their answers to three questions:

- What do I want to hear?
- What do I want to say?
- What do I want to achieve from this conversation?

Then everyone reads out what they have written, one by one. Other team members can ask for clarification, but not start to discuss the issue. When everyone has "declared their hand", the dialogue begins. When an agreement appears to have been reached, the chairperson asks each team member in turn whether they have heard, said and achieved what they wanted. If anyone says "No", the dialogue continues until they are satisfied, or there is clear agreement to disagree.

Teams using this approach report that:

- The items take much less time overall, than if approached with the usual "free for all" – even with the initial reflection time

- People behave better towards each other and are more inclusive of each other's concerns
- Both people, who like to take more time to think things through, and those, who come to decisions more rapidly, feel their needs have been met
- Accountabilities are clear and decisions are much less likely to be remade at a later date.

Many teams also value using the "4 I's" to summarise the meeting:
- Issues (what did we discuss?)
- Ideas (what new thinking occurred?)
- Insights (what do we see differently?)
- Intentions (what are we going to do differently?)

To this you may also add:
- What learning have we acquired?
- How has this meeting contributed to our performance as a team?

The importance of positive relationships in the workplace

"THOSE WHO HAVE A 'WHY' TO LIVE,
CAN BEAR WITH ALMOST ANY 'HOW'."
Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

The workplace retains a central role in many people's lives therefore it is to be expected that positive relationships or the opposite will impact on the teams you work with.
With the average person spending more time at work than on any other daily activity, it is vital that individuals within any team feel connected and supported by peers, subordinates, and leaders and indeed by you, their team coach.
Indeed, a significant contributor to workplace stress is psychosocial hazards related to the culture within an organization, such as poor interpersonal relations and a lack of policies and practices related to respect for workers (Stoewen, 2016).
While prolonged exposure to these psychosocial hazards is related to increased psychiatric and physiological health problems, positive social relationships among employees are how work gets done.
Thus, whether organizations – and their employees – flounder or flourish largely depends on the quality of the social relationships they possess.
In this handout for M6 we will examine the importance of positive social interactions, and discuss just some of the ways positive employee interaction can be introduced and encouraged in the workplace.

We will explore:

- The Science behind Positive Relationships at Work
- What are the Benefits of Social Interactions at Work?
- Why are Positive Interactions in the Workplace so important?
- How to foster employee interactions in the workplace?

The Science Behind Positive Relationships at Work

Psychologists have long identified the desire to feel connected to others as a basic human need with interpersonal relationships having a significant impact on mental health, health behavior, physical health, and mortality risk (Umberson & Montez, 2010). Indeed, human physiological systems are highly responsive to positive social interactions.
Gable & Gosnell (2011) surmised that humans are endowed with separate reflexive brain networks for social thinking; thus close relationships are linked to health as they build certain biological systems which may protect against the adverse effects of stress. Their research found that the brain releases oxytocin in response to social contact, a powerful hormone linked to trustworthiness and motivation to help others in the workplace.
Dunbar (1998) suggested that when individuals experience social pain in the workplace from feeling isolated, for instance, the region of the brain which is activated is the same as if physical pain had been experienced.
Conversely, when relationships in the workplace are characterized by cooperation, trust, and fairness, the reward center of the brain is activated which encourages future interactions that promote employee trust, respect, and confidence, with employees believing the best in each other and inspiring each other in their performance (Geue, 2017).
Positive social interactions at work directly affect the body's physiological processes. According to Heaphy & Dutton (2008), positive social interactions serve to bolster physiological resourcefulness by fortifying the cardiovascular, immune, and neuroendocrine

systems through immediate and enduring decreases in cardiovascular reactivity, strengthened immune responses, and healthier hormonal patterns.
Put simply, when employees experience positive relationships, the body's ability to build, maintain, and repair itself is improved both in the workplace and in non-work related leisure and resting times.

Consider:

What Are the Benefits of Social Interaction at Work?

1. Social interactions play an essential role in wellbeing, which, in turn, has a positive impact on employee engagement. Organizations with higher levels of employee engagement indicated lower business costs, improved performance outcomes, lower staff turnover and absenteeism, and fewer safety incidents (Gallup, 2015).
2. Social interaction can lead to knowledge and productivity spillover from trained to untrained workers, in collaborative team settings, or between senior and junior workers: particularly in low-skilled tasks and occupations (Cornelissen, 2016). For instance, Mas & Moretti (2009) found that productivity was improved when employees were assigned to work alongside faster, more knowledgeable co-workers.
3. Employees who are satisfied with the overall quality of their workplace relationships are likely to be more attached to the organization. Thus leaders who encourage informal interactions – such as out of hours social gatherings – can foster the development of more positive relationships and significantly influence and improve employee satisfaction (Sias, 2005).
4. A lack of social interaction in the workplace can have potentially negative consequences in relation to social support. Several studies have indicated that the sense of isolation that comes from this lack of social support is associated with a host of negative health consequences, including a higher risk of cardiovascular disease, compromised immunity, increased risk of depression, and shortened lifespan (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Cacioppo et al., 2011; Mushtaq et al., 2014).
5. Strong 'within-group' ties with co-workers (characterized by frequent social interactions) provide opportunities to facilitate innovative thinking. According to Wang, Fang, Qureshi, & Janssen (2015), the strong ties developed by social interactions assist innovators in the search for inspiration, sponsorship, and support within the workplace.
6. Social interactions in the workplace help to ensure everyone in a group is on the same page. According to Sias, Krone, & Jablin (2002), peer relationships (also referred to as equivalent status relationships) represent the most common type of employee interaction.
7. These peer relationships exist between co-workers with no formal authority over one another and act as an important source of informational and emotional support for employees. Co-workers who possess knowledge about – and an understanding of – their specific workplace experience are given opportunities to feel connected and included through the sharing of information through regular social interactions.
8. Social interactions in the workplace have been found to increase self-reported positive feelings at the end of the workday (Nolan & Küpers, 2009).

9. Repeated positive social interactions cultivate greater shared experiences and the gradual development of more trusting relationships (Oh, Chung, & Labianca, 2004). When trust exists between team members, they are more likely to engage in positive, cooperative behavior, which in turn increases employee access to valuable resources.
10. Employees who engage in positive social interactions also tend to exhibit more altruistic behaviors by providing co-workers with help, guidance, advice, and feedback on various work-related matters (Hamilton, 2007).
11. The information collated through social interaction can help a team collectively improve its performance and the precision of its estimates (Jayles et al., 2017).
12. Social interaction and positive relationships are important for various attitudinal, well-being, and performance-related outcomes. Basford & Offermann (2012) found that employees in both low- and high-status positions reported higher levels of motivation when interpersonal relationships with co-workers were good.

"BUT THERE WAS NO NEED TO BE ASHAMED OF TEARS,
FOR TEARS BORE WITNESS THAT A MAN HAD
THE GREATEST OF COURAGE, THE COURAGE TO SUFFER."
Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

Why are Positive Interactions in the Workplace So Important?

As with any interpersonal relationship, those formed in the workplace reflect a varying and dynamic spectrum of quality.

At their very best, interactions can be a source of enrichment and vitality that helps and encourages individuals, groups, and organizations as a whole to thrive and flourish.

Conversely, negative workplace interactions have the potential to be a source of psychological distress, depletion, and dysfunction.

Positive social interactions are often referred to as appetitive. They are characterized by the pursuit of rewarding and desirable outcomes, while negative ones are aversive and commonly characterized by unwelcome and punishing results (Reis & Gable, 2003).

Positive interactions in the workplace have been shown to improve job satisfaction and positively influence staff turnover as employees who experience support from colleagues are more likely to remain in an organization long term (Hodson, 2004; Moynihan and Pandey, 2008).

Furthermore, positive interactions between supportive co-workers who provide help and clarification of tasks can improve an individual's understanding of their role, thus reducing job role ambiguity and workload, which, according to Chiaburu & Harrison (2008), may ultimately increase job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Positive interactions in the workplace are marked by trust, mutual regard, and active engagement. According to Rosales (2015), interactions characterized in this way can improve employee awareness of others, foster positive emotions such as empathy and compassion, and increase the likelihood of trusting, respectful engagement between individuals.

In contrast, negatively valenced ties between two individuals at work are characterized by animosity, exclusion, or avoidance, which can cause stress and job dissatisfaction (Rosales, 2015).

This can, unsurprisingly, have a detrimental effect upon an employee's emotional wellbeing to the extent that social relations at work which are disrespectful, distrustful, and lack reciprocity are independent predictors of medically diagnosed depression (Oksanen et al., 2010).

Employees tend to be involved in many dyadic relationships within the workplace with individuals generally possessing both negative and positive ties. However, when individuals have more negative associations with co-workers than positive, they might experience negative moods, emotions, and other adverse outcomes such as social ostracism (Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007).

Mastroianni & Storberg-Walker (2014) indicated that well-being is enhanced through work interactions when those interactions are trusting, collaborative, and positive, and when employees feel valued and respected. Interactions lacking these characteristics were found to detract from well-being and negatively impacted sleeping and eating patterns, socializing, exercise, personal relations, careers, and energy.

If we consider that, on average, individuals spend around 40 hours per week at work, it is imperative that employees feel connected and supported through positive social relationships. Seligman (2011) noted that happiness could not be achieved without social relationships, and while social relationships do not guarantee happiness, happiness does not often occur without them (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

Such connections and interactions give energy to individuals and to the organization in which they work, whereas negative relationships may deplete energy and lead to individual and corporate floundering (Ragins & Dutton, 2007).

Reflection:

How to Foster Employee Interaction in teams and organisations?

Given the organizational and personal benefits reaped from positive workplace relationships, creating opportunities for and fostering positive social interactions should be a paramount objective for team-leaders and managers.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management's 2016 Employee Job Satisfaction and Employee Report (SHRM, 2016), relationships with colleagues was deemed the number one contributor to employee engagement, with 77% of respondents listing workplace connections as a priority.

It is therefore crucial that leaders and managers determine ways in which positive workplace relationships can be promoted. In doing so, organizations are better able to adopt a more relationship-centric outlook wherein the fostering of positive employee interactions becomes a goal in and of itself. According to Geue (2017), 'elevating interactions' is a critical requirement in creating a positive work environment.

In general, maximizing engagement levels can be boiled down to two key concepts; the removal of barriers that currently limit social interaction in the workplace, and creating opportunities for employees to engage with each other. These outcomes can be achieved in several ways, and while not all approaches are suitable for all organizational types, the concepts hold true.

Promote Face-to-Face Interaction

With the advent of digital communication, we're now only ever a few clicks away from contact with virtually anyone anywhere in the world. While the internet has facilitated communication on a scale hereto unrivaled, there's a lot to be said for traditional face-to-

face interaction. An email might be easier, but we lose the nuances of nonverbal cues and tone.
For traditional workplaces, consider the layout of shared working environments. Is the layout of the office conducive to employee interaction? Considering the stereotypical 'bull-pen' office environment, literally removing the barriers between employees can open doors for social interaction opportunities.

Include Remote Workers

What about employees who work remotely? The upwards trend in telecommuting and the impact of Covid 19 is expected to escalate over the coming years with more employees working from home (or otherwise remotely), posing fresh challenges for the relationship-centric organization.
While organizations have been keen to reap the benefits of access to a broader talent pool and reduced office overheads, remote workers pose a challenge to the relationship-centric workplace.
Where in-person interaction isn't feasible, 'face-to-face' interaction can still be facilitated using social technology. Using video-conferencing software and making the use thereof a regular occurrence can help to foster positive social relationships for workers not physically present.

Plan Collaborative Events

Dedicating time to specifically promoting positive social interactions in the workplace can be a powerful route to ensuring the relationship-centric approach doesn't fall by the wayside amidst organizational pressure to achieve.
Set aside time for employees to interact; focus on interests and experiences out of work to direct attention to shared interests to allow for employees to discover commonalities and relatedness.

Effectively Mediate Conflicts

Both employees and employers require meaningful relationships with others in the workplace, and yet these needs may be impeded by counterproductive and destructive workplace practices (Bolden and Gosling, 2006).
Organizational leaders should make attempts to minimize negative interactions between employees by proactively mediating and resolving differences early on and building a culture of open communication that fosters trust and relationship building.

Lead by Example

Creating a physical environment that nurtures positive social interactions between employees is a significant first step, but to promote relationships, a good team leader, supervisor, or manager should practice what they preach and you, as a Team Coach, can support them as they develop role-modelling skills.
By establishing consistent patterns of behavior that exemplify the desired culture, they can promote an emotional environment of inclusivity and positivity.

Impact Of Change On Our Clients

Remember the workplace is one of the few environments where people are 'forced' into relationships. By their very nature, workplace environments are made up of a blend of diverse groups of people – many of whom would have very little interest in freely meeting or socializing outside of the workplace. While a company's greatest asset is its employees, those employees do not work together harmoniously all the time.

There are, however, actions that any individual or organization can take to encourage employee interaction and develop an inclusive workplace culture. Through the promotion of positive social interactions, workplace relationships can be a source of individual and collective growth, learning, and flourishing.

When the team breaks into subgroups with different agendas

When teams develop into subgroups with different agendas or priorities, honest communication is one of the first casualties. An important part of the both team leader's role and the team coach's role is to prevent this kind of disunity – which we call "fracking" – from occurring.

Warning signs in team coaching sessions include:

- Defensive body language (posture, lack of eye contact etc)
- A sudden drop in energy
- Greatly reduced or greatly increased challenge

Prevention being better than cure, the team coach should recognise the signs and bring the issue into the open for discussion. Gain agreement that allowing fracking to happen isn't desirable for anyone, then focus on reconfirming what the team is agreed on.

Ask the question: *What would an ideal, unifying solution be to the issue that threatens to divide us?* When you have something of a consensus, appoint one person from each of the two sides to co-facilitate a discussion around how to bring such a solution about. Even if there remain some areas of disagreement, end the dialogue with a commitment to continuing the exploration process in a spirit of goodwill and innovation.

Leadership functions: keys to changing team dynamics

A seminal paper on leadership functions identifies 15 functions divided amongst two mutually dependent phases of team activity (Morgeson et al, 2009). The first phase, called transition, consists of evaluation and planning activities. The second phase shifts focus to goal accomplishment.

Transition phase leadership functions, maintain the authors, include:

1. Compose the team – bringing together the best available people for the job, taking into account complementary competences and ability to work together for a common goal
2. Define the mission – clarifying the team purpose
3. Establish performance expectations and set team goals – goals which are appropriately challenging and motivating
4. Structure and plan – dividing out tasks and responsibilities, scheduling and so on
5. Train and develop team members – including through coaching by the leader
6. Sense-making -- defined as "identifying essential environmental events, interpreting these events given the team's performance situation, and communicating this interpretation to the team"
7. Providing feedback – both to individuals and to the team collectively

Action phase leadership functions include:

1. Monitor the team – "examining the team's processes, performance, and the external team context"
2. Manage team boundaries – "representing the team's interests to individuals and groups outside the team in order to protect the team from interference as well as persuading others to support them" and co-ordinating activities with other teams
3. Challenge the team – its performance, assumptions and ways of working
4. Perform team tasks – "participating in, intervening in, or otherwise performing some of the team's task work"
5. Solve problems – diagnosing and resolving issues that prevent performance
6. Provide resources – for example, information, equipment, finance and people
7. Encourage team self-management – empowerment, accountability and responsibility
8. Support the team social climate – encouraging positive and supportive behaviours between team members

While a superhero leader may take on all of these functions in their entirety, in most teams some of the responsibility – or at least the delivery – of every one of them can be shared with the team or distributed among them at least to some extent. From our studies of high performing teams, we can see examples for all 15 leadership functions:

- *Compose the team*. Where team members interview and have a strong voice in selection of new members, it tends to have a positive effect on whether a hire will work out. In part, this is because they are able to bring different and multiple perspectives, compared to relying solely on the leader's impressions of the person. A moderating factor may be the team's willingness to embrace diversity in new members.
- *Define the mission*. In practice, with the sometimes exception of the leadership team, the mission is provided from above. The task for the team and the leader is to interpret the mission in ways that make sense for the team and align with both corporate and team values. If the team is to embrace and own the mission, it *must*

have some input into its expression and the narrative around it. The mission then becomes a collaborative endeavour between the formal leader and the team members. In some cases, the team becomes the custodian of the mission. For example, in a hospital pressure from above to hit arbitrary targets led the leader of a clinical team to lose track of the team's primary mission (patient care). A principled stand by the team gave him the courage (and the ammunition) to resist the pressures upon him.

- *Establish performance expectations and set team goals*. When people set their own goals and performance indicators, they tend to be more demanding.
- *Structure and plan.* When the entire team understands the goals and the priorities, they are well-equipped to manage this process without the leader's input, or with the leader providing oversight and approval. Over the decades, I have encountered a variety of organizations, where teams self-organize, deciding their own priorities and even, in some cases, how they should be rewarded. In recent years, Frederic Laloux has documented multiple examples of the benefits of shifting responsibility for who does what and when to the team members and away from leaders external to the team.
- *Train and develop*. The leader of a team is not necessarily the most competent and knowledgeable person in relation to the tasks the team undertakes. (If they are, it is harder for them to step outside and above a focus on the task.) The idea that the role of a leader is to coach the team is widespread, but highly questionable. A definition more in line with current understanding of effective team leadership is that the leader's responsibility is to support the creation of a coaching culture, where everyone in the team may coach each other. (Ideally, including the team members coaching the leader.)
- *Sense-making*. The assumption that sense-making is a top down process, with the leader interpreting events in the light of greater knowledge of business strategy and the wider business context, may also be challenged as overly simplistic. The perceptions of internal and external customers. For example, may also play a role in sense-making and team member may have higher connectedness with these resources than the leader. Long-serving team members may also be better than a less experienced leader at linking current events with team history.
- *Providing feedback*. The literature on leader-member exchange is replete with studies that conclude managers are poor at giving developmental feedback. A recent *Harvard Business Review* report (Whitlock, 2018) found that 44% of managers found giving feedback stressful or difficult and nearly half of these avoided giving feedback. The literature on psychological safety (which is strongly linked to team performance) finds that honest feedback between team members (and from team members to the leader) are key indicators of a psychological safe environment. In a healthy team, feedback-giving in all directions is an essential attribute. Both the leader and team members also have the ability to gather feedback from external stakeholders, to inform how the team evaluates its performance.
- *Monitoring the team.* Transparent processes that allow the team and its leader to recognise when tasks are going well and less well and how the team is performing against agreed targets are very basic tools of management. But who decides what the measures should be, how to collect them and when they should be adjusted to new circumstances? There appears anecdotally to be a strong connection between employees' perception that a measure is or isn't helpful to their job roles and the emotional connection with and commitment to the measure. If this is correct, then it makes sense for team members to have greater say in the design and implantation of measures and how they are monitored.

- *Managing the boundaries*. Teams do not normally work in isolation. Every interaction with someone outside the team has an impact on team reputation. It can be argued that a responsibility of a leader is to manage reputation upwards, while team members take greater responsibility for reputation management horizontally and below.
- *Challenging the team*. In a study of team learning that I conducted with European Union funding some 20 years ago (Clutterbuck 1998), I identified a number of roles that team members played. These included roles related to challenging the team's assumptions, ways of working and so on. If the leader is the only one providing this kind of challenge, it creates the potential for the team members to abdicate their own responsibility for innovation and self-challenge. The argument is that the leader, being wholly or partial external to the team, has a clearer perspective. In reality, team members can just as easily invite customers to present to them. Moreover, new team members can provide valuable different perspectives in their first few weeks with them team.
- *Performing team tasks*. The balance of the leader's role between facing upwards and facing downwards can be delicate and vary widely with context. If the leader is inside or partially inside the team, they have greater potential to become a role model. The danger is that they do too much of the day-to-day work (often because they enjoy it) and not enough stepping back and stepping out. If the team and the leader can regularly discuss together what the team needs from the leader, then a healthier allocation of work may result.
- *Solve problems*. How many times have we heard the maxim "Don't just bring me problems; bring me solutions"? The leader as heroic fixer disempowers his or her team. A better option for high performance is to develop the skills of the team individually and collectively to be creative and innovate.
- *Provide resources*. By virtue of hierarchical authority and the links that that provides with resource-holders, formal leaders are arguably more likely to be successful in ensuring the team is allocated the resources it needs. But outside of the formal structures resource acquisition takes place through the relationships individuals have with colleagues in other teams. In a study of talent management (Clutterbuck, 2012) I was struck by the way that people demonstrated leadership qualities through informal interactions on the intranet. One of the conclusions of the study was that identifying issues that needed to be tackled (opportunities or problems), developing innovate solutions and bringing together the resources to implement those decisions often happened without any intervention from hierarchical leaders at all. People sharing ideas on the intranet would volunteer information and sometimes time to bring ideas from concept to reality. There is probably a threshold, where informal leadership of this kind has to give way to more structured processes in order to obtain the level of financial support needed. In the work team, however, making stakeholder engagement and resource acquisition a collective responsibility fits well within a digital world.
- *Encourage team self-management*. Yes, it's important for the leader to do this, but peer support is also a factor in how well people manage themselves. Collective self-management requires team members to accept responsibility for educating and supporting colleagues – for example, by coaching and mentoring.
- *The social climate*. It is often said that the leader creates the climate. Their mood affects that of everyone else in the team. Equally, the host isn't the only one who makes a party – the guests have a role to play, too. The social climate is underpinned by *fizz* (enjoyment of the work you do) and *buzz* (enjoying the company around you). The greater the say the team has in how work is allocated to

fit with each member's interests and energy and in who joins the team, the more positive the social climate will be, irrespective of the leader's mood!

Implications for team coaching
Critical questions team coaching may pose to a team and its leader include:

- What kind of leadership does this team need to best achieve its mission?
- Which functions of leadership are most important for this team?
- Which of those functions, if any, should be solely the responsibility of the leader?
- Which would be best delegated to the team itself?
- Which should be shared responsibilities?
- How can we assess the quality of how we implement these leadership functions?
- What additional resources do we need to distribute leadership in this way?

Facilitating open and perceptive conversations around these topics opens the teams' eyes to all sorts of possibilities. The leadership functions reviewed in this article provide a useful fall-back when the team is unable to clarify the most relevant leadership functions for its circumstances. However, expect to identify others not in this list. For example, Morgeson et al include protecting the team from interference as part f boundary management, but for many teams this is one of the most important roles they expect of a manager. In a case represented for review in a recent team coach training workshop, the leader's inability to provide that protection was a major cause of the team's dysfunction.

Overall, the job of the team coach is to help the team take a much more perceptive and nuanced view of the role of leadership and to distinguish between the *role* of a leader and the *functions* of leadership. The permutations of how the team and its leader might work together then become much, much wider.

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Respect in the team environment

Duration: 45 minutes

Instructions to participants

Individually, write down a list of behaviours and attitudes that you would see in a team that had a high and low level of owed respect. Then the same for earned respect. We will combine these and explore the implications for this team.

Comments to facilitators

Kristie Rogers, assistant professor of management at Marquette University, defines two kinds of respect: earned respect and owed respect. Organizations and the teams within them need both. Owed respect comes from the assumption that everyone is a valued contributor. Earned respect is accorded to people because of their achievements, personal qualities or some other valued characteristic. When owed respect dominates, people feel less accountable and less motivated to perform; when earned respect dominate, there is a lack of collaboration.

This simple exercise helps a team achieve an appropriate balance between the two kinds of respect. Ask everyone to write down a list of behaviours and attitudes that they would see in a team that had a high and low level of owed respect. Then the same for earned respect.

Combine their lists into one, grouping similar answers under common headings, as appropriate.

Now initiate discussion of the following questions, in order:

1. What is the balance between owed and earned respect in this team?
2. How different is that from what it needs to be to perform at our best?
3. What can we do to change the balance (if we need to)?