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**Stream: Coaching and Executive Development**

**What is going on when I am coaching a team? An auto ethnographical study of team coaching.**

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**What is going on when I am coaching a team? An auto ethnographical study of team coaching.**

**Abstract**

**Importance**

The purpose of this paper is to respond to calls to elucidate the practice of team coaching and to shed light on the conceptual confusion between team coaching and other team based interventions. HRD professionals can utilise these ideas to challenge coaches to share the theory, philosophy and intent underpinning their own practice.

Team coaching is explored via autoethnography in order to utilise the lived experience of practice to engage in conversation with extant theory. The inner dialogue of the coach is made public and enables coaches to reflect on the findings in relation to their own coaching practice.

A tentative framework of team coaching is proposed. This framework may further our understanding of team coaching and provide an opportunity explore its use in a variety of team coaching contexts.

**Key Words**

Team coaching, autoethnography, team performance

**1. Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to respond to calls to elucidate the practice of team coaching which lags behind dyadic coaching research (Peters and Carr, 2013). Team structures in organisations have continued to grow and along with them calls for team coaching. Brown and Grant observe ‘conceptual confusion’ (2010, p. 36) as to how team coaching is distinctive from other team-based interventions, such as team consultation, team building and team facilitation.

The majority of work published on team coaching is developed through practice (Hawkins, 2011; Clutterbuck, 2008; Thornton, 2010). I perceive two deficits with the existing knowledge base. First, whilst these writers share valuable experience, tools and approaches the underpinning theory base is not always evident. Secondly, in practice I find existing models do not always relate to my particular context or do not appear flexible in a changing situation. As Thornton (2010) remarks;

*‘I have found value in many of the conceptual frameworks and tools that other practitioners have created, and have created not a few of my own. I have yet to find one that is good at all times and in all places.*

*In coaching teams, all tools require an artisan, or perhaps at times an artist…. In the end it is our judgment and our experience-honed instincts that lead us to pick up a particular instrument.’ (p. 125)*

**2. Objectives of the study**

The driver for this study is to develop confidence in my own judgement and instinct when working with teams. I want to demonstrate minute-to-minute awareness of the dynamic context of teams. To achieve this I aim to describe a conceptual framework of team coaching that can be used in my team coaching practice underpinned by streams of intertwined theory relating to team effectiveness, group behaviour, team development interventions and coaching.

I have adopted an autoethnographic approach to unlock my understanding of what goes on and what I do in practice, drawing on the rich experiences of working alongside my clients and responding to their needs spontaneously, in the moment. I am experimenting with the process of bringing fieldwork alive and represented within an autoethnographic text such that I can develop deeper ways of knowing and understanding the experience of team coaching. This paper shares a partial account of this process and reports on some tentative early findings.

**3. What are teams, team coaching, team performance and team effectiveness?**

*3.1 Teams*

In my team coaching practice I work with intact organisational teams as a collective unit. The words group and team are sometimes used interchangeably. However there is significant difference in how we conceptualise the two entities and as a result the focus of the coaching that might be taking place. A typical definition of a team describes interdependent individuals working towards a common goal. For example:

*A collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and who are seen by others as an intact social entity embedded in one or more larger social systems, and who manage their relationships across boundaries (Cohen & Bailey, 1997, p. 241).*

*3.2 Team coaching*

When I describe team coaching I am talking about enabling the team to ‘achieve a common goal, paying attention both to individual performance and to group collaboration and performance (Thornton, 2010, p.122). This is distinct from coaches only working on a 1:1 basis with individuals who are all members of the same team or working on individual goals in a group setting. For example Kets de Vries (2014) has developed a group coaching process that works with senior leaders, focusing on their individual development and awareness within the group context.

*3.3 Team performance*

Hackman and Wageman, (2005, p. 272) provide a ‘three-dimensional conception’ of performance that comprises:

* Quality outcomes as defined by stakeholders.
* Social processes that enhance the team’s capability to collaborate.
* Positive impact on the learning and well being of individuals.

*3.4 Team Effectiveness*

There have been several comprehensive reviews of the team literature (Burke et al, 2006; Cohen and Bailey, 1997; Cacioppe and Stace, 2008; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Mathieu Maynard, Rapp & Gilson, 2008)that enable me to conceptualise my understanding of the dynamic, multi-level nature of teams through three interrelating systems: the individuals who make up the team, the social entity of the team itself and the wider organisational context in which the team is placed.

The core elements of these inter-relating systems are outlined in Figure 3.i. below. The team is shown embedded in wider system of the organisation, interacting with external stakeholders and changing over time.

**Figure 3.i. The interrelating systems of an effective team**



An effective team is one where the team members consider themselves a real team and have a compelling direction for their work driven by clear, meaningful goals. (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993) Teams that are designed well are suitably resourced and have well defined scope of tasks for which they have autonomy and regular information about the results. Effective teams tend to operate within a supportive organisational climate where teamwork is developed and rewarded. (Wageman, Hackman & Lehman, 2005).

Teamwork behaviours are summarised by Salas, Sims & Burke, (2005) into five key sets of behaviours: team leadership, mutual performance monitoring, supportive backing up behaviours; active focus on innovation and adaptability; and a positive willingness to engage in team oriented activities.

A number of studies recognise the mediating mechanisms emerging over time that that are typically designated as cognitive, affective or motivational in nature. For example, developing shared understandings about the team’s purpose and tasks, an emerging sense of trust amongst team members and a belief about the team’s ability to succeed (Mathieu, et al , 2008).

**4. Approach: Autoethnography to elucidate our own practice**

*4.1 What is autoethnography?*

Autoethnography; writing (graphy) about the self (auto) whilst embedded in a particular culture (ethno), in my case the culture of team coaching allows me to explore my practice through my communications, my actions and ways of being (Adams, Holman Jones, Ellis, 2015).

4.2 Sense making through story telling

I see autoethnography as a method of sense making through story telling. Through narratives we capture the ‘lived, felt bodily experiences’ (Cunliffe & Coupland, 20011,p.68). Storytelling creates a mechanism for attaching meaning to experiences such that we can make sense of them, interpret them and decide how to act. Autoethnography allows me to situate myself in the story of team coaching and join the conversation with others. Personal experience enables exploration of topics that may be hidden from view such as Vickers’s (2007) account of workplace bullying. In my case I am illuminating an aspect of organisational life that often occurs behind closed doors rendering it invisible to outsiders. As a team coach I know what I do, I rarely have the privilege of observing others in action.

4.3 *Autoethnographic Fieldwork and data collection*

Data collection methods within autoethnography appear similar to many forms of qualitative research including field notes, interviews and personal documents. However, there is an autobiographical slant to the collection process and data may constitute memories of a particular lived experience (Giorgio, 2013).

Muncey, (2005) creates her story based on memories utilising photographs and personal documents as artefacts. Whybrow (2013) makes daily diary entries during a tour of duty in a combat zone. As an analogy for my own work I relate to Margot Duncan’s experiences as a hypermedia designer in the mid 1990’s (Duncan, 2004). With a similar need to explore her own practice she recognises a need to ‘externalise her inner dialogue’ (p. 29), as she was ‘the only one making decisions at the interface’ (p. 28). Duncan created field notebooks and collected artefacts from her work such as annotated screen shots to elucidate her practice.

This paper is part of a wider research project working with two operational teams and a group of peer coaches. Here I describe the process of fieldwork and data collection with one of the teams.

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***Summer 2013: Entry in to the field***

*Margaret stayed behind after our last MBA seminar of the year. You mentioned you were starting some research in team coaching; I would love my organisation to be involved. If I can set some thing up would you work with one of our teams?*

*“ I would love to”. I beamed.*

***November 2013: Contracting meeting with team manager and client contact***

*Margaret’s call had been brief. “Come over for lunch, I want to introduce you to one of our managers. We think we have a team we want you to work with, it will be great for your research.”*

*Peter was enthusiastic. Margaret had prepared the ground well, or perhaps it was an easy sell, given I was agreeing to work with his managers pro bono in exchange for some research data. We discussed his objectives to integrate people development and coaching skills as a core management approach and how it might work through a learning team approach. We agree a way forwards: to create two self-sustaining autonomous teams –I was to be the team coach.*

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**Team one:** a local authority management team

The stated team objective is to identify ways to further the understanding of coaching within the department. Initially it was proposed that I work with the whole management team, split for logistical reasons in to two teams of seven, with the manager in one team and my client contact who played the role of internal consultant in the other. After two meetings with each of the departmental management teams it was agreed that seven volunteers would form a single developmental team. The team comprised six women and one man aged from 28 to 55 with experience in the local authority spanning five years to 25 years. We meet a further four times over a nine-month period. I am not familiar with the organisation prior to the commencement of the project.

Table 4.1 summarises the fieldwork and data collection activities. The research involves fieldwork into the practical aspects of team coaching and field notes observing the experience, reflective feedback participants, dialogues with participants and reflective writing.

**Table 4.1: Fieldwork design and data collection**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Research approach** | **Participants** | **Activities**  | **Data collection** |
| Auto ethnography as first person research approach during team coaching practice | Operational team 1 | 8 meetings over 12 monthsJan 2014 – Dec 2014 | Audio recording of meetings, participant reflective diaries.Field notes, participant observation and personal reflective log. |

*4.4 Writing autoethnographic texts*

I agree with Richardson that ‘writing is a process of discovery’ (2000p.936) and that through writing we can explore different perspectives and challenge our taken for granted assumptions. I am seeking to make sense of fieldwork through story. I collate of all my material in to a chronological set of field data including e-mail exchanges, 1:1 meetings, reflective diary entries and field notes from myself along with formal responses to reflective questions from the team members. The data set comprises over 20,000 words of written materials plus over ten hours of recordings of the coaching sessions.

In order to write the story I take inspiration from Carolyn Ellis who suggests asking the question- ‘what is going on here?’ (Adams, Holman Jones, Ellis, 2015, p.66) and from Norman Denzin (2014), who expresses, the need to follow conventions of story telling such as character and plot. Further, Denzin calls for a deconstructive approach that challenges the writer’s voice as the ‘knowing I’ and seeks to present other voices, alternative ways of constructing subjective accounts of experience (p38). I annotate my data with reflections expressing what I am noticing going on in the story and identify characters. I am thinking about the roles or characters I play, the characters in the teams; the different voices and how they might tell the story.

From these annotations I create mind maps that capture the themes of the story and the characters involved. These mind maps provide me with some source material to write creatively about the experiences in short vignettes. Writing creatively enables me to build a tapestry of ideas and voices in which I seek to create a rich evocation of an experience that has resonance for others. This complex ‘crystallization’ (Richardson, 2000, p. 934) brings together a deeper understanding of a topic under discussion that can be observed from different angles and shed light on different aspects of the phenomenon.

As I begin to write I am anxious about my ability to produce suitably evocative texts (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) whilst at the same time offer deeper understandings via theoretical thinking. “I seek to organize my personal experience conceptually, link it explicitly to theory and to propose new avenues for theory development and research. I approach my autoethnography with a desire to converse with the literature” (Wall, 2008 p. 40)To create a layered account (Ronai, 1995, p. 396)

**5. Data analysis: Creating a layered account**

**Vignette 1: February 5th. First meeting with local authority team -Melrose Community Centre**

Its 3.30pm in the afternoon. The sky is a thick relentless grey and at this time of year the daylight is fading fast .

I am driving to Melrose community centre in the industrial end of town to meet with a new coaching client team. This is the first meeting. I am are not quite sure what to expect.

The room is fuggy and hot from the previous meeting. Peter, the manager, is already there and deep in conversation with two colleagues. The room is small, the table very large so that everyone crams on the outer periphery with a huge empty void in the centre; there is a problem with the IT so no access to the few slides I prepared to set the scene for the session. An IT technician is attempting to reconnect the system.

Time is ticking. The session will start late. My anxiety begins to mount.

Team members shuffle in. I greet each person as they arrive, struggling round the furniture to introduce myself whilst still keeping half an eye on the technician who still cannot log on to the shared IT system. The messy reality of working on someone else’s turf hits home.

Finally we get started.

“So tell me about your experiences of coaching?”

Barbara is first, she outlines her coaching credentials and her enthusiasm for coaching. Your mood lifts. Others share some limited experiences.

**Peter:** “Well, I have never coached anyone and I have never been coached.”

Curious! You are thinking – you maintain a fixed smile. Sheila looks down at her notes wraps her cardigan more tightly around her. Barbara is looking at you expectantly, curiously, a wry smile of amusement playing on the lips.

“So! Lets talk about our work together. I thought we could begin with hopes and fears…”

**Valerie (**seizes the moment).

“I have to raise a concern about Peter being here, I really don’t think people will be comfortable about sharing their concerns about coaching in front of him? Its not personal Peter it is your position as the manager.”

**Barbara** : We tried this before on our coach training, everyone says the managers shouldn’t be in the teams.

My mind accelerates in to overdrive…what is going on here? Is this a plan being executed? As leaders of the coaching training do Barbara and Valerie want to demonstrate their credentials and leadership in this area?

Perhaps they feel I have usurped them?

Peter keeps smiling serenely. He says nothing.

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*5. 1 Creating contracts*

As coaches we are familiar with agreeing contracts with our clients, and in the case of organisational coaching this may include three-way contracting to include the coachee and other organisational stakeholders such as the manager. Hawkins (2011) and Thornton (2010) recommend initial meetings with their clients that may include 1:1 meetings with each team member in addition to the team leader or team sponsor.

I had resisted this early diagnosis phase to avoid appearing as an expert in the process, however, such meetings up front would have provided significant data about the context of the organisation, the concerns and priorities of individual team members and inform the contract I might propose in working with the team.

It would have also changed the dynamics in the initial meetings between the team members and myself such that they were all invested in the process through their confidential conversations with me. As it was I arrived on their terrain with very little knowledge of the relationships and having to build rapport from a position of distrust?

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**Vignette 2: 1st meeting at Melrose Community centre**

**Discussion about hopes and fears continues**

**Bob**: Well, not sure what to say. I’ve said before coaching doesn’t work in my area. If some one doesn’t follow a procedure that’s mandatory I have to just tell them what to do!

**Sheila**: Exactly, I don’t know when it was agreed we have to coach all the time. I mean, now we are tracking it and making it compulsory no one wants to do it. It doesn’t work like that.

**Barbara**: We are not saying you have to coach all of the time Bob. We are not saying you are a bad manager. Perhaps we could just discuss benefits where it does work. My hope is we can all learn some thing.

**Peter**: Well, I was hoping that working together like this would go beyond the discussion about using coaching as a management approach. Its about us working together differently.

**Sheila:** Well it was a three-line whip to be here. I’m being paid to be here… I’m not saying I wont commit to it but…

*5.2 Team building*

When a team first comes together practitioners often recognise the developmental stages of forming, storming, norming and performing conceptualized by Tuckman, (1965) and may plan interventions such as “getting to know you exercises” and norming activities of agreeing team behaviours followed by the development of team performance processes for decision making, problem solving or information sharing.

These activities are often described as team building. Team building as a concept is not well defined as the term is used to describe a wide range of activities. In a recent systemic review of literature Klein et al, (2009) identify team building activities as addressing four distinct aspects of team functioning; goal setting; improving social relations; clarifying roles, and developing capacity for problem solving. With a diversity of cases and methodologies presented the term remains poorly conceptualised and proves difficult to extract learning relating to what took place during the intervention and how and why these interventions may work. Buller (1987) recognised that a likely variable in the success of an intervention could be the ‘consultant’ and the quality of the relationships formed between themselves and the client team.

Similar to team building, team coaches are often employed in supporting a team to clarify team purpose and goals (Carr and Peters, 2013, Clutterbuck, 2014; Hackman and Wageman, 2005; Hawkins, 2011; Thornton, 2010). Activities include, creating a process for setting and reviewing goals, ensuring alignment with personal or sub team goals and developing motivation and commitment. However, Clutterbuck, 2014,p.279 advises against “too narrow a focus on goals” if this obfuscates other more limiting behaviours imported in to the team from their personal histories, established routines and cultural context.

For example, Kasl, Marsick and Dechant, (1997) demonstrated how it is possible for a team to go through stages of forming, storming, norming and performing ‘yet never challenge dysfunctional assumptions or create new knowledge through strategies such reframing or perspective integration’ (p. 231) thus remaining relatively immature in terms of demonstrating shared learning and collaborative behaviours. In other words teams exist in organisations, performing to some degree but never achieving anything close to optimal functioning, as relational issues have not been addressed.

 Wheelan (2005) explains the developmental stages of teams as: dependency and inclusion; counter-dependency and fight; trust and cooperation and finally productivity and effectiveness. Each stage is characterised by a key concern for the team participants: Do I belong? Can I have my say? Can we work together cooperatively? Can we develop a cohesive and effective unit even during task related conflict? Previous perceptions of the existing relationship history may play out in the new team affecting the group dynamics. The team coach looks to create a climate of trust and support such that effective new behaviours can emerge.

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**Vignette 3: 1st meeting at Melrose Community centre : Deliberations on how to respond.**

**Peter:** I have never coached anyone and I have never been coached.

**Valerie:** “I have to raise a concern about Peter being here, I really don’t think people will be comfortable about sharing their concerns about coaching in front of him?” Its not personal Peter it is your position as the manager. People will feel judged.”

**Knowing coach**: Create a safe space for people to exchange honest views

**Doubting coach**: I have only been here five minutes. I’m not ready to deal with this conflict.

**Knowing coach:** You cannot let this fundamental point pass

**Doubting coach**: They are talking about trust. Or is it a power struggle?

**Knowing coach**: Peter is demonstrating vulnerability. Where is the power struggle in that?

**Doubting coach**: I have only been here five minutes; I don’t know what is going on.

**Knowing coach**: You have to work with this. DON’T IGNORE IT.

**Doubting coach**: Trust is fundamental. But…does Valerie have another agenda?

**Deliberating coach:** If I challenge Valerie do I risk alienating her?

**Coach :** “Thank you for raising that concern, that’s a really important point – I absolutely agree we need people to feel safe in this team… Although I can’t help reflecting on the fact that Peter just shared vulnerability by admitting he knows nothing about coaching. Doesn’t the manager also have the potential to feel judged?

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*5.3 Team coaching: creating the climate*

It can be inferred from those coaches that advocate the importance of dialogue and collaboration within teams that there is a need to create an appropriate climate for these behaviours to emerge. Creating an effective team-working climate requires psychological safety according to Edmondson, (1999) such that team members feel safe to speak up even in situations of hierarchy and disagreement. Thornton. (2010) provides an explanation of a coach’s role in ‘holding’ the group so that anxieties are minimised or ‘contained’ such that team members are able to encounter unfamiliar information or explore issues normally avoided by the team. Creating a safe space to explore issues is a common concept in dyadic coaching where the quality of the relationship is key. Carl Rogers (1961) first described the conditions for a genuine helping relationship including the elements such as empathy, unconditional positive regard and ability to connect with the client. Examples of creating appropriate team climate have been explored in research involving real work teams to develop better decision making in the banking sector (Ben-Hur, Kinley and Jonsen, 2011) and to improve innovation in a public safety organisation (Rousseau, Aubé and Tremblay, 2012). In particular the coach provides behavioural feedback encouraging behaviours that support the desired climate.

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**Vignette 4 Melrose: Second meeting with new team. July 2014**

The team has now reformed as a team of seven who chose to participate and lead the developmental initiative. The team is Valerie, Barbara, Sheila, Shirley, Fiona, Mike and Jess

In this second meeting of the new team the participants discuss coaching as a developmental approach and share their understandings with each other, they listen, reflect, and share their own stories. At the conclusion of the meeting they discuss what next, how can they take coaching in the department to the next level, perhaps build some quick wins. After much exploration they consider setting up a development day for the management team.

My Reflective log July 2014: On the nature of facilitating team dialogue.

Progress at last – but slow! Giving time for everyone to have his or her say is time consuming. They all want to share experiences and the organisational issues are always bubbling just below the surface.

I feel like the ideas catcher, trying to ensure everyone is heard and appreciated. Its not that they don’t listen to each other but they offer up ideas at tangents and the resulting dialogue can feel quite muddled and lack coherence.

The feedback appears to reflect that I am doing something to keep them on track without them feeling stifled or ‘steered’. How do I capture the nature of that behaviour?

Its noticeable that they seem to need help identifying how to move forwards, they are able to recognise issues and talk around them but can not make a choice about moving forwards. They say they want autonomy but appear to be unaccustomed to operating in this unconfined space.

I think that providing a scaffolding of small focus areas, summarising what is being said and encouraging them to agree immediate next steps is helping. Natural leaders may emerge but in the meantime I think the scaffolding is helping everyone to participate.

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*5.4 Facilitating learning and dialogue*

Clutterbuck, describes team coaching as

*‘a learning intervention designed to increase collective capability and performance of a group or team through application of the coaching principles of assisted reflection, analysis and motivation for change.* (2014, p. 271)

Most authors recognise the importance of learning and dialogue, which enable the team to collaborate effectively. Coaches describe facilitating dialogue through agreeing and role modeling appropriate behaviours, such as suspending assumptions, letting go of the need to be right and seeking shared understanding and insight (Brown and Grant, 2010). I agree with Clutterbuck that team coaching goes beyond pure facilitation although skills of facilitating are present. Team facilitation is typically described as a series of activities designed to help a group achieve a particular outcome often related to problem solving or decision-making (Wardale, 2013; Thomes, 2008).

Facilitators guide their clients through a defined process to achieve a particular outcome whilst creating and maintaining a suitable collaborative climate (Azadegan & Kolfschoten, 2014; Garavan, etal, 2002). Facilitators are likely to be seen as the experts in a particular process technology. However, Schwartz, (2002) describes a continuum of activities from basic facilitation where the facilitator provides skills to solve group’s problems through to a more developmental form of facilitation has is a closer resonance with coaching in that it seeks to help the group solve a problem and build their capacity to become self-facilitating.

Team coaches may consider themselves facilitators of team learning. Recent team learning research (Van Woerkom, M. & Croon, M. (2009); Decuyper, Dochy & Van den Bosche, 2010) emphasise the role of sharing perspectives, co-construction of ideas and dialogue as part of the information processing that allows a team to develop a shared understanding of a particular idea. Teams who are innovate and adapt their approaches are thought to be more successful performers over time (Rosen, Bedwell, Wildman, Fritzsche, Salas and Burke, 2011)

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**Vignette 5 Melrose Community centre – 3rd meeting September 2014**

I am back at Melrose, the feedback from the last session had been so positive and action oriented, I can’t wait to hear how they have been getting on.

Fiona is the first one to articulate the contrast between the energy of the previous meeting and their feelings of helplessness.

Hijacked

Overwhelmed

Workload

KPIs

Funding issues

Spreadsheets

Frustration, frustration, frustration.

Somehow the whole coaching initiative is tied up in all of these wider concerns.

I am silent for a long time. Listening. Deliberating. How can I help them now?

They come back around to the issue of the line manager

**Mike:** “He doesn’t get it”

**Barbara**: “He doesn’t believe in it.”

**Jess**: “Yes but he doesn’t *stop* us doing any thing”

**Fiona:** “Well… in the end it does.”

I play back what I have heard. “So what do you want to do?”

The team is divided.

**Sheila** “We need to be more assertive, make more noise, take on the strategic issues!”

**Valerie:** “They are so risk averse, we are stuck in bureaucracy. Lets just work on our own development and our own teams.”

I’m mindful of getting sucked back in.

Imagine for a minute we had a magic wand - what would it look like in a years time?”

Some positive ideas emerge… but then we are back bogged down in the issues and the roadblocks. Round and round

I hold up a mirror. Every time you think big the issues seem to overcome you and you risk being paralysed. Maybe staring small is in fact still on the way to the bigger goal. It is within your control and you can reach out from there.

“Development by stealth.” Barbara offers

We develop some practical action steps. Perhaps the way forward in baby steps is better than no way forward at all.

*5.5 Team coaching: whole system thinking*

It is agreed that coaching a team requires whole systems thinking with Hawkins, (2011) and Thornton, (2010) being most explicit in describing specific interventions. The idea that an organisation is similar to a living organism with cells, boundaries and interrelationships creates a metaphor first coined by Von Bertalanffy (1972) to make sense of what might be going on in a team environment. This is seen as a significant advantage over dyadic coaching which has been criticized (Brown and Grant, 2010) for not taking the organisational context sufficiently in to account or failing to enable individuals to operate effectively within the wider system. Professional coaches report creating leverage in teams’ by raising awareness of their interactions with customers, stakeholders and other parts of the organisational system (Hauser, 2014).

*5.6 Team process consultation*

The systemic nature of team coaching resonates with the concept of team process consultation forwarded by Schein (1968, 1987, 1999) who articulates his work primarily as a helping relationship where the consultant supports the clients in learning how to diagnose problems and design interventions whilst retaining ownership and responsibility. The language of process consultation may feel initially off-putting to a coach. Consultants as experts in organisational systems observing task processes and diagnosing problems evokes a relationship of expert and client, of unequal power that is at odds to the typical assumptions underpinning a coaching relationship.

However, Schein is at pains to elaborate that his perception of consultancy is one where the focus is on developing the clients capacity for learning such that they become self sustaining. Schein was inspired by the work of Carl Rogers and Kurt Lewin, was a colleague of Douglas McGregor, and contemporary of Chris Argyris. Their ideas are incorporated in to his conceptualisation of a consultancy as a helping relationship that is: underpinned by the self determination of the client; a belief in people and their ability to recognise and work on their own problems; the power of the benefits of working on the here and now processes exhibited within a group setting and the benefits of building awareness, creating the conditions for learning and helping clients to remain responsible and action oriented. With this underpinning philosophy team process consultation has a great deal of resonance for coaches who draw from similar philosophical traditions.

In his later work Schein, (1987) develops his ideas relating to the consultants own awareness of their own thinking and emotions, which may reveal biases and assumptions and how these may impact how we act in the moment. This chimes with coaching literature that very much encourages the coach to utilise their own awareness within their practice.

**6. Discussion: Team effectiveness and team based interventions**

Relating to the conceptualisation of an effective team described above it appears that team building activities and team facilitation focus on the establishment of the team purpose and teamwork behaviours. Given the challenges of creating a team at the commencement of its lifecycle its not surprising that team interventions often refer to activities to establish direction and norms of behaviour at this time. Later on a trigger for an intervention may be a problem with a particular team task or process.

Hackman and Wageman (2005) place their emphasis on ‘task performance processes” (2005, p.273) most clearly associated with a behavioural type of coaching perhaps most suited to team leader coaches with en emphasis on goal setting, assessment, feedback and action planning. (Rousseau, Aubé and Tremblay, 2011; Clutterbuck, 2014)

Most team coaches describe a style of intervention that goes beyond facilitating essential processes to a whole systems approach, enabling awareness and action through creating a suitable climate and creating an on going developmental alliance such that the client team remain responsible for owning the process and the outcomes.

Team coaching draws on similar philosophies as team process consultation with a remit of enabling team members to become aware of how they behave and operate within a wider system and have the ability to observe and diagnose process issues at an individual, team and wider organisational level.

In the table below I summarise the similarities purpose, role and typical time frame of the team-based interventions. This presents a continuum from one of specific team building interventions or facilitated events through to more developmental team process consultation and finally to team coaching.

 What is clear is that individual coaches, facilitators and consultants are influenced by their own background knowledge and skills and the language they use may be interpreted somewhat differently depending upon their influences and the expectations of the client group. This can create confusion if not clearly explained. Understanding the potential meanings of this range of approaches enables me to be more precise about articulating what I am doing when I am coaching a team and how it may incorporate other approaches such as skills of facilitation or ideas of team process consultation, enabling me to develop my ideas with others.

**Table 6.1 Team based interventions: A continuum of approaches**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Team intervention** | **Purpose of the intervention** | **Role of coach/ consultant** | **Time frame of intervention** |
| Team building | Goal settingRelationalRole clarityProblem solving | Provide external facilitation for a particular team focus area. Consultant as expert | Typically one off interventions focussed on current team context e.g start up phase  |
| Team facilitation  | Problem solvingDecision makingCollaboration through dialogue | Guiding a process towards a particular team outcome. Consultant as expert in a particular process. | Typically one off interventions focussed on team processes |
| Team process consultation | Helping the client to perceive, understand and act upon processes within their environment such as decision-making, communication and problem solving.  | Supports the team to explore issues, diagnose problems, and identify actions. Will confront behaviours that appear at odds with stated goals.Consultant has expertise in organisational processes. | Process of collaborative problem solving over time that expands to include boundaries of the team and wider system. |
| Team coaching | A contextualized, systemic developmental intervention designed to increase the collective capability, collaboration and performance of the team over time. | Creates a collaborative alliance that enables the team to focus on team goals and performance, build awareness, and design actions to adapt and change over time. Coach likely to have expertise in organisational processes, which may inform practice.  | Longer term developmental alliance that evolves over time. |

**7. Conclusions: Tentatively grasping the complexity of team coaching**

In this paper I have considered the theory of team effectiveness and the role of team based interventions. I have considered some of the theoretical concepts underpinning these approaches and reflected on how the ideas play out within practice via short vignettes.

*7.1 A definition of team coaching*

Drawing the themes together I propose my description of team coaching as:

***A contextualised, systemic developmental intervention designed to increase the collective awareness, capability, collaboration and performance of the team over time.***

 As I coach I hold my awareness in four domains and ask myself, what is the teams awareness in this domain and what support do they need to develop awareness and capability:

1. The functional elements of the team. What are they trying to achieve, are they clear on a way forwards, do they have adequate skills and resources and are they motivated to achieve their goals.
2. Team work behaviours such as mutual monitoring, support and back up. Processes of collaboration such as dialogue, learning, problem solving and decision-making. Are behaviours supportive or getting in the way?
3. Team dynamics and team climate. What is going on in the team and between team members? Who speaks, who has power? Is there psychological safety within the team? Are elements of the team dynamic getting in the way of performance and learning?
4. The environmental context. What are the systemic issues that are affecting the team? What is their relationship with their external environment, other teams and key stakeholders? How do they relate to the external environment?

In Figure 7.1. I offer a framework of team coaching that identifies four modes of awareness. By keeping my attention across these modes I have a method of managing in the moment and making decisions about where to focus and how I might respond to a given situation. To make it memorable I use the mnemonic LIFE.

**Figure 7.1 LIFE : Team coaching framework – Modes of awareness**



**8. Limitations and further research**

This paper is based on the experiences of working with one operational team over a 12-month period and uses these experiences to engage with aspects of team coaching literature and underpinning theory. In order to develop this model further I intend to repeat the process with different client teams and through dialogue with practising team coaches. I hope to continue to develop my own understanding of this complex area of organisational life and be able to disseminate the work such that the conversation continues and the concepts relating to team coaching are further refined.

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