



Article

The Rise & Power of Team Coaching

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In this article, Louise Mc Namara of Invisio, explores the rise of teams in organisation structures and what a high performing team looks like, before going on to clarify what team coaching is, how it differs from other team development initiatives and why it has the potential to be a game changer in the future of teams and a significant contributor to organisation effectiveness. She then covers what team coaching looks like and why it is not for everyone.

Deloitte, in their 2019 Global Human Capital Trends, highlight that the shift from hierarchies to teams in organisations is well underway. Thirty-one percent of survey respondents now operate mostly or almost wholly in teams, with another 65 percent saying they are mostly hierarchical, but with some cross-functional team-based work. Teams have fast become the way of doing business and come in many forms including virtual, management, leadership, project and parallel teams

Think for a moment about the teams in your or your client's organisation

- How many of these teams would you count as high performing?
- Is there untapped potential in these teams?
- Have you ever been part of a dysfunctional team, in spite of each individual being competent and capable?
- How well do the teams you work with consider the wider system beyond their own team and are conscious of delivering value to all?

A high performing team can be described as a group of goal-focused individuals, each with their own expertise and complementary skills who collaborate, innovate and produce consistently superior results. Common attributes of such teams include open communication, trust, collaboration, laser sharp focus on achieving shared goals, strong accountability to the team and their goals, agreed norms and behaviours and clear role expectations. How does that compare to the teams you had in mind earlier?

Why Team Coaching

Leaders often assume that people know how to work together effectively in teams. The reality though is that, at best, only one in five teams are high performing and it may be as low as one in ten (Wageman et al. 2008). Deloitte research shows that many leaders do not know how to operate in teams and have not yet adopted the team model of engaging with each other.

In a VUCA environment, optimal team functioning is both more important and more difficult than ever. Team coaching can provide the antidote to VUCA environments, in a way that no other team development initiative has been able to do thus far.

With the rise in the need for teamworking, organisations are looking for a game changer to develop teams, in a way that has not been done before, to become effective and high performing. Team coaching has the potential to be that game change, to enable and accelerate team performance and potential.

Team coaching is today where one to one coaching was 20 years ago in Ireland. Like everything 20 years on, its development is at accelerated speed. We all know the power of one to one coaching, but many of our significant challenges and opportunities no longer rely on individuals, but rather teams.

The [6th Ridler report](#) shows that 76% of organisations expect to increase their use of team coaching over the next two years.

So, what is team coaching and how does it differ from other team development initiatives?

There are many definitions of team coaching, all with similarities and subtle differences. My favourite is that of Woodstra, 2018:

'Team coaching is partnering with a team, in a thought provoking and creative process, that inspires the team to maximise their collective potential. Fundamentally team coaching is about increasing connection and collaboration, which are at the heart of team effectiveness'

There is a lot of confusion as to what team coaching is and how it differs from other team development initiatives. Some of the other initiative include the likes of group coaching, team facilitation, team building, team development, team process facilitation.

Team facilitation is managing the process of a meeting or workshop, to free the team up to focus on the task. Group coaching is the coaching of individuals in a group context, where the focus is on individuals as individuals.

Team coaching is about live interactions with the team, in the here and now, with the focus on how the team acts, not the individuals in the team. The team is the client and the object of focus, not the individuals. The focus is on the dynamics that play out, the impact of these dynamics on the team and the wider system, where power and authority lies and shifts and encouraging the team using this awareness of 'as is' to design their 'to be' as a team.

A team facilitator may consider themselves to be a change agent. A team coach considers themselves to be an awareness agent. The team coach offers the awareness and the team choose the change. We have all heard the advice to work ON and not just IN our business. Taking that analogy, during team coaching the team work ON, not IN the team where the focus is on helping the team to be more effective as a team.

What might a team coaching programme look like?

Team coaching is a **long term engagement** between the coach and the team, where the team, and not the individuals, is the client. A typical engagement would run for a 9-12 month term. As we know, with one to one coaching, it takes time to observe and understand the 'as is' and then to work toward defining and becoming the 'to be'. One to one coaching typically spans over a 6 month period and we all know why. Similarly, with teams it takes time. The AGES model (introduced by Lila Davachi, Tobias Kiefer, David Rock and Lisa Rock in 2010 and refined by researchers at Columbia, New York University and the NeuroLeadership Institute) supports spacing for effective development.

The engagement will typically start with **contracting**. Who to contract with can be a dilemma. The team is the client, so do you contract with the team or the team leader? At Invisio we believe that contracting with the team itself is essential, even if contracting with the team leader is also required. If the team do not have a clear reason and motivation for the team coaching its potential is significantly reduced. This means meeting with the team and letting them decide if the coach is someone they want to go on the journey with.

The team coach needs to somewhat **orient** themselves in terms of the system the team operates within and also needs to orient the team in terms of the engagement. **Team diagnostics** may or may not be relevant at this stage and appropriate diagnostics are selected to match the situation. We would caution teams around asking for stakeholder feedback at this stage. It may be too early and counterproductive at this time. A **team launch** follows, which is typically 1-2 days in duration.

The team is now well set up for **live action coaching**. This is the most challenging and interesting part for both the team and the coach. The coach live coaches the team in the normal flow of their work as a team e.g. in team meeting. At Invisio we focus on 'as is' as a real representation of what happens out in the field – what plays out during meetings is very likely to be what plays out in other interactions between the team. Our role is to track, describe and respond (TDR), naming patterns and dynamics that play out (both those that are supporting the team and those that may be holding them back) and allow them the space to discuss, while holding a safe space and protecting psychological safety. We are bringing up the 'unsaid' and moving the implicit to explicit to afford the team the opportunity to address in a safe way. In saying safe, safe and comfortable are not the same thing – team coaching is often uncomfortable – that's why it is so powerful – it goes to the places the team would not go on their own and gives them the opportunity to build better relations and deal with the interferences that are impacting them achieving their potential.

As the team coaching engagement progresses, the team coach starts to pull back and challenge the team to coach themselves and name patterns and dynamics as they come up. At the end of the engagement the team does a **final review** of where they are at versus what they had hoped for and what they need to do to continue to support themselves as a team.

Team Coaching is not for Everyone

That is so important it is worth repeating – TEAM COACHING IS NOT FOR EVERYONE!

Not for every coach and not for every team. I must admit when I was being trained as a team coach it did cross my mind that this might be one qualification I put in my back pocket and never use! Whilst all my one to one experience is of course very relevant, coaching a team is a very different ball game. But the potential of team coaching to have a real impact on teams drove me on and it came out of the back pocket again!

Teams need to be ready for team coaching. A level of team maturity is required. Just a few of the conditions necessary to be ready include, being a real team, with the right people and skills and a solid team structure. Without all the right conditions and maturity team coaching not only will not add value, but can actually take away value from the team. If a team is not ready for team coaching, there will most likely be other team interventions that will fit and there may be individual supports suitable also such as one to one coaching for the team leader.

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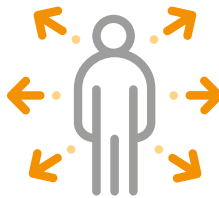
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