

# What do experienced team coaches do? Current practice in Australia and New Zealand

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## Abstract

Team coaching in organisations is becoming increasingly commonplace, but there remains a lack of clarity as to what team coaching is and what makes it effective. Thirty-six team coaches with experience of working in Australia and New Zealand were interviewed in an attempt to explore what practitioners actually do. Evidence was found of multiple approaches. All the coaches focussed on process, however different coaches attended to different aspects of process. For example, some focussed on task while others placed more emphasis on relationships. Nine dimensions of practice were identified, five relating to process and four to preferred methodology.

**Key Words:** coaching, team coaching, high performing teams, group dynamics, group process.

## Introduction

Industry sources suggest that about a third of organisations use team coaching (Henley Business School, 2010; Sherpa Coaching, 2012, 2013), yet there is little agreement as to what team coaching is (Clutterbuck, 2013b, Peters & Carr, 2013), how effective it is (Hackman & Wageman, 2005; Clutterbuck, 2008, 2013a; Liu, Pirola-Merlo, Yang, & Huang, 2009; Brown & Grant, 2010, Hicks, 2010, Kets De Vries, 2015; Airo & Dahl, 2015) or how it differs from group coaching (Carter & Hawkins, 2013) and other interventions, such as facilitation. Hawkins (2014) suggests that team coaching is 30 years behind individual coaching in terms of common definitions, research and established training programs or accreditations.

Although there may as yet be little evidence to support the efficacy of team coaching, there exist multiple recommendations as to how team coaches should approach their work. Four years ago Peters & Carr (2013) counted more than 130 published team coaching models. So in seeking to establish whether 'team coaching' is effective, the question is how the researcher should decide which approaches to study. Hawkins (2014) suggests that one of the next steps for team coaching is to seek to understand what models, tools and interventions team

coaches are currently using. Accordingly, the first purpose of this study was to explore what models, tools and approaches experienced team coaches currently use.

The second purpose of the study was to understand how team coaches learn to coach teams. Clutterbuck (2008, p.220) suggests there are two categories of team coaches. The first transfer what they do in coaching individuals and “*add a dash of facilitation and or team building, and wing it.*” The second category, he writes, start from a deep understanding of process and team dynamics, distinguish carefully between team coaching and team facilitation, and have a clear understanding of practical and ethical issues. He suggests that there many more coaches in the first category than in the second. This may be because there is a general dearth of established training programs for team coaches (Hawkins, 2014). This may be particularly true of Australia and New Zealand.

## **Team coaching models**

In this section four team coaching models are compared and contrasted. Three of these models were cited by Peters & Carr (2013, p.124) as being among four “*key team coaching models*” in their meta-review of team effectiveness and team coaching literature. Of those four approaches the models of Hackman & Wageman (2005), Clutterbuck (2007) and Hawkins (2011) are retained. The Michael Moral (2009) model has been replaced by Christine Thornton’s (2010) work on team and group coaching, on the basis that we found few other references to Moral’s model in the broader literature, and Thornton’s work is heavily influenced by psychodynamic and group systems theories in a way that clearly distinguishes it from the other works. This comparative review provided the researchers with a context through which to explore the practices of the 36 team coaches interviewed in this study. The methodology of the study is outlined and results reported before the results are discussed with reference to the broader literature.

## **Four team coaching models**

### **1. Hackman & Wageman (2005)**

Hackman & Wageman (2005) outlined an approach to team coaching further developed by Wageman, Nunes, Burruss & Hackman (2008). This approach is explicitly developmental and non-relational. Developmental approaches to team coaching encourage the coach to determine where the team is on its developmental journey and to design an intervention accordingly. The authors adopt the developmental framework reported by Gersick (1988, 1989). Gersick (1988) observed eight groups in action, attending and recording every meeting each team had. She found no evidence that teams developed as described by Tuckman; forming, storming, norming, performing and, later, adjourning (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Instead she identified a pattern she called ‘punctuated equilibrium’, findings she replicated in a laboratory study (Gersick, 1989). According to punctuated equilibrium theory teams are most receptive to coaching at the very beginning, the middle, and the end of their time together. Hackman & Wageman (2005) suggest motivational coaching will be most effective in the team’s first meeting, the point at which teams quickly form frameworks as to how they will operate together. At the mid-point transition Gersick’s teams stopped to review the way they had been working together and searched for new ways of operating. At this stage Hackman & Wageman (2005) suggest a more consultative coaching approach. At completion

teams become more focussed on the needs of external stakeholders and on reviewing how people had worked with each other. At this stage a more educational coaching approach may be most effective.

Wageman et al (2008) advise coaches not to address personal relationships explicitly. In their view performance drives the quality of relationships, not the other way round. Focussing on personal relationships, they say, may be engaging and enjoyable, but is unlikely to lead to improvements in performance. Hackman & Wageman's definition of team coaching reflects this focus on task, "*Direct interaction with a team intended to help members make co-ordinated and task-appropriate use of their collective resources in accomplishing the team's work*". (Hackman & Wageman, 2005, p.269)

## **2. Clutterbuck (2007, 2013a)**

Clutterbuck's perspective on team coaching differs from that of Hackman & Wageman in at least three respects. First, Clutterbuck (2007) challenges the notion that coaches may be wasting their time focussing on relationships. He suggests that it is the purpose of the intervention that determines where the coach spends his/her energies. Second, whilst acknowledging the value of Gersick's work, he suggests that her findings may be contextual, and that evidence for Tuckman's model may be found in other situations.

Wheelan (2003) cited evidence in support of a developmental model similar to Tuckman's. The first stage in her model is 'dependency & inclusion', team members demonstrating dependency on the leader and a primary concern with being included. The second stage is 'counterdependency & fight', during which the team experiences conflict in developing a unified set of goals and operating procedures. This is followed by 'trust & structure', characterized by negotiation and the solidifying of relationships, and work, in which the team is able to direct most of its energies on goal achievement. Wheelan (2003) reported data from more than 200 work teams suggesting the stages are real and that teams are more or less equally distributed across the four stages. Dassen (2015) also suggests teams proceed through four stages based on a psychodynamic perspective, the four stages being 'awareness' of defensive patterns and the need to change; 'letting go' of those patterns; the 'creativity of new behaviours' and 'action', in which new skills are integrated into day to day practice.

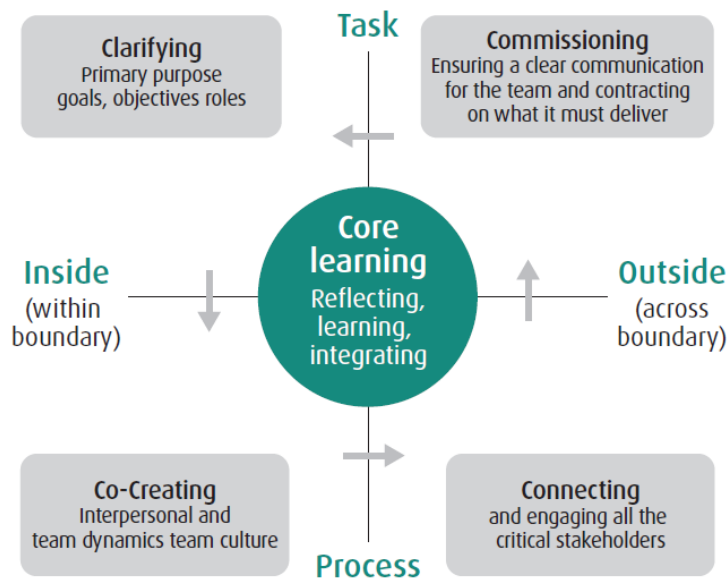
The third difference between the writings of Hackman & Wageman and Clutterbuck relates to learning. Clutterbuck (2007) refers to the work of Senge (1999) in connecting team coaching to organisational learning. Team learning, he suggests, is a key component of an organisational learning agenda, and a key function of team coaching is to help teams, and thereby organisations, to learn and become more effective. Learning is explicit in Clutterbuck's (2013a, p.271) most recent definition of team coaching;

*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.*

## **3. Hawkins (2011)**

Like Clutterbuck, Hawkins (2011) believes the team coach needs to pay attention to the emotional work of the team, and also sees the team as a learning system. As Clutterbuck

acknowledges in his preface to Hawkins' book 'Leadership Team Coaching', Hawkins' approach is more explicitly systemic in its approach. Hawkins (2011) suggests that many approaches to working with teams tend to focus overly on the relationships between team members, and not enough on the relationships team members have with others outside the team, the broader organizational 'system'. Hawkins (2011) suggests that high performing teams are strong in five disciplines (figure 1).



**Figure 1 Five disciplines of high performing teams (Hawkins, 2011)**

The five disciplines represent a balanced focus on task and process, and the internal and external work of the team. To be effective a team needs:

- i) A clear commission from those who bring it into being, including a clear purpose and success criteria. A team leader must be appointed who then picks the right team members (task/external focus).
- ii) To develop its own mission, including purpose, goals, values and ways of working (task/internal focus).
- iii) To constantly attend to how it works together, constantly reviewing and co-creating (process/internal focus).
- iv) To engage with external stakeholders effectively (process/external focus).
- v) To continually stand back and reflect on its own performance and process, constantly learning both as a collective and as individuals.

Each of these five disciplines represents a different challenge for the team coach.

#### **4. Thornton (2010)**

Thornton's (2010) psychodynamic approach to team and group coaching further builds on the role of the coach in being able to manage relationships and to adopt a systemic perspective. She suggests that many of the ways in which team members communicate with each other are

unconscious, and learning is both an intellectual and emotional experience. Thornton's approach then is very relational. Nevertheless the coach's primary task is to help the team to achieve its goal and the coach will only call out those aspects of process that are likely to prove meaningful and relevant to the team. Like Hawkins (2011), Thornton's (2010) approach is broadly systemic, with the functioning of the team clearly positioned within the functioning of the branch, the company, the market and society as a whole. Teams are seen both as social systems in themselves and subsystems of larger systems; 'nested systems'. "*It is at our peril that we ignore the system within which our client team ... operates*" (Thornton, 2010, p.90)

These four approaches differ in the extent to which they are developmental, relational and systemic. Hackman & Wageman's (2005) approach is explicitly developmental and non-relational. Further, the authors privilege Gersick's developmental theory (1988, 1989). Clutterbuck (2007) suggests that some of Hackman & Wageman's conclusions may be contextual, effectively advocating relational approaches to team coaching in certain contexts and validating other developmental approaches, again depending on context. Hawkins (2011) also suggests that the quality of relationships between team members is important, citing it as one of five key team disciplines. His model is also explicitly systemic, directing the practitioner to consider the impact of factors outside the team on the internal functioning of the team. Like Hawkins, Thornton (2010) suggests that the coach should only call out the functioning of relationships between team members if this is likely to prove meaningful and relevant to team members. Nevertheless, her approach places a strong emphasis on the inner workings of the team, as well as the need to consider the team as an entity embedded in a broader system.

### **Project methodology**

The methodology for this study was mixed, featuring a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

### ***Grounded theory***

Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology in which the researcher approaches the study with a broad question or area of interest (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Data collection and analysis are regarded as interrelated processes to ensure that nothing is missed that may be salient to the area being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). 'Concepts' are regarded as the basic units of analysis in grounded research and concepts are grouped into 'categories' (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Responses are categorized into concepts as interviews are conducted, usually by two or more researchers who check each other's analyses with each other as the research proceeds. In this case the primary researcher conducted all of the interviews over a three week period. After all the interviews had been conducted the primary and secondary researcher categorised answers to the qualitative questions independently using the interviewing researcher's notes. The researchers compared any variance in their responses, a process which served to further define the categories.

### ***Sampling***

Standard sampling techniques require that the researcher has access to a list of all the members of a population (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004), information in this case was unavailable given the lack of alignment as to how team coaching should be defined, and the

fact that the coaching industry is unregulated. A version of respondent-based sampling was used (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). Given that the main representative coaching bodies in Australia and New Zealand are their respective national psychological associations and the International Coaching Federation (ICF), the researchers initially contacted roughly equal numbers of coaches known to be members of their national psychological association, the ICF, or neither. Cognisant also that both the national psychology associations and the ICF have strong state chapters, and so might feasibly have locally preferred approaches to team coaching, it was decided to invite coaches from different states of Australia. An initial group of 60 coaches were invited, all of whom were known to have been practising individual coaching for at least two years and who were believed to also do team coaching. Twelve coaches declined to participate, 10 because they said they didn't do team or group coaching and 17 failed to reply. Of the 31 coaches who agreed to participate, five referred on other coaches who they knew did some team coaching. All 36 coaches interviewed had first-hand experience of working in Australia/New Zealand.

	No.	Member of the ICF	Registered Psychologist	No. years coaching teams/groups	% time coaching teams/groups
NSW	17	4	5	13.5	33.8
VIC	7	2	4	9.3	20.0
QLD	5	1	0	17.2	15.0
ACT	1	0	0	6.0	5.0
WA	1	1	0	5.0	5.0
SA	1	1	0	12.0	20.0
NZ	2	1	1	15.5	19.0
USA	2	1	1	17.5	30.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>25.5</b>

**Table 1: Coaches surveyed - profile**

### *Research questions*

Participants were asked three rounds of questions. The first round of questions comprised questions that allowed us to characterize the participant population. For example:

- How long have you been coaching teams?
- What proportion of your time do you spend coaching teams and groups?
- Are you a member of the International Coaching Federation (ICF)?
- Are you a registered psychologist?

The second round of questions were designed to explore what approaches participants brought to their work as team coaches; what theories and models they were influenced by and how they applied this knowledge and experience in practice. One of these questions asked participants for readily quantifiable data:

- What theories/models inform your practice?

The remaining questions were open questions, to be analysed using a form of grounded theory research. Three of these questions addressed the participant's approach to team coaching:

- Can you describe your approach to team coaching?

- Can you tell me a story of a team coaching intervention that went well?
- Can you tell me a story of a team coaching intervention that didn't go so well?

Three questions were designed to be analysed separately:

- How did you learn to do team coaching?
- What have been some of your key learnings?
- What are some of the challenges for coaches who have worked mainly in the 1:1 domain, moving into working with teams and groups?

The final round of questions were closed questions. Participants were asked how would they categorize their practice with respect to a taxonomy of approaches suggested by Hackman & Wageman (2005). In their review of research and theory Hackman & Wageman (2005) suggested there exist four generic approaches to team coaching:

1. Eclectic, approaches that derive from no particular theoretical perspective, but have considerable face validity;
2. Process consultation, in which the practitioner focuses on how team or group members are working together;
3. Behavioral models, in which the coach observes the team and provides feedback on their behaviour, in service of them learning to become more effective;
4. Developmental coaching, in which the coach operates from a timing perspective, believing that the team will require different kinds of intervention at different stages of its development.

The answers to these questions were analysed quantitatively.

### ***Process***

The primary researcher used a semi-structured questionnaire with a licence to explore new themes as they emerged. One interviewer conducted all the interviews, making handwritten notes including selected quotes, which were later transcribed. Participants agreed to participate in 45 minute interviews about aspects of their practice. The actual duration of interviews varied between approximately 25 and 60 minutes. All participants were told that their responses would be treated as confidential. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face, the rest of the interviews were conducted over the phone.

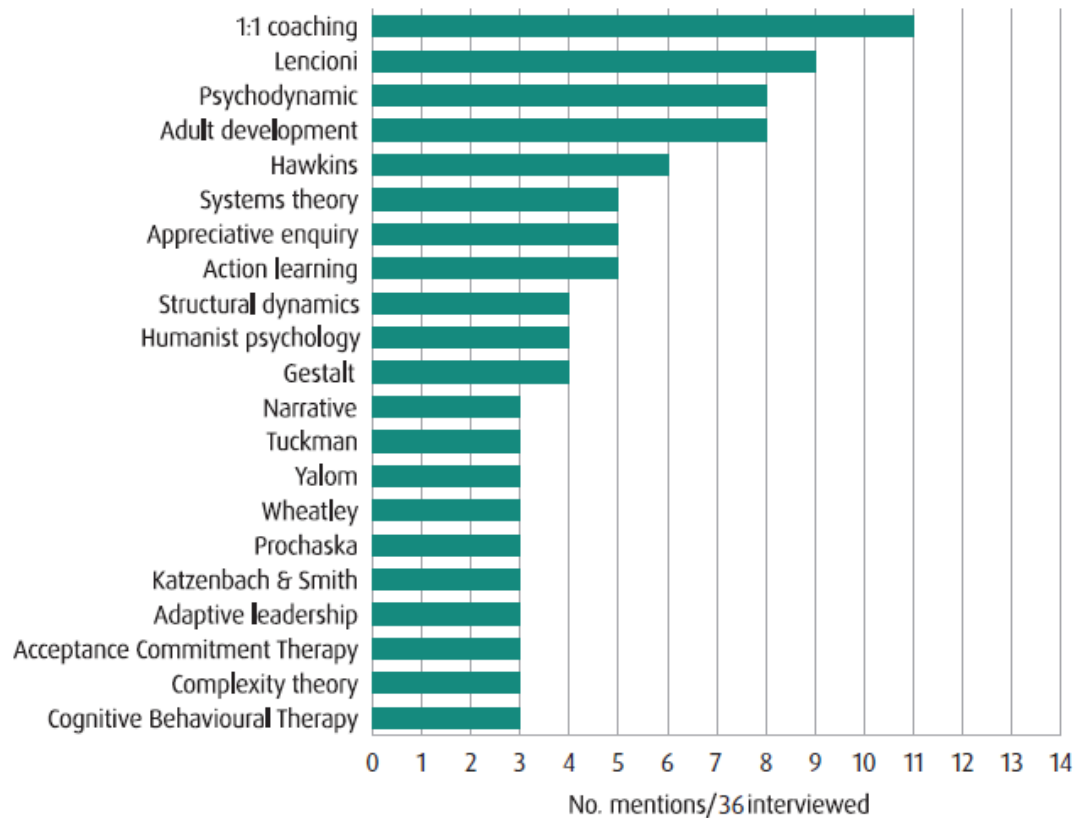
### **Findings**

This section begins by outlining the diversity of models and theories cited by participants as informing their practice. The approaches adopted by team coaches are then reported in two ways; first with reference to Hackman & Wageman's (2005) four generic approaches, and then with reference to the results of the qualitative research. Finally, the results to the final three qualitative questions are reported, around learning to coach teams, key learnings and challenges for coaches seeking to move from coaching individuals to coaching teams.

### **Theoretical foundations**

Figure 2 lists all the authors, models or areas of practice that were mentioned by at least three interviewees. These categories are not all exclusive. For example, Yalom's work and aspects of structural dynamics are psychodynamic in orientation. Many versions of adult development theory are also influenced by psychodynamic theory (e.g. Kegan ,1982) as is

David Drake's work on narrative coaching (Drake, 2015). Nevertheless, the results demonstrate the wide range of models and theories being used by team coaches, from perspectives informed solely by individual coaching theory, to popular management texts (e.g. Lencioni, 2002), to therapeutic models (e.g. Acceptance & Commitment Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy), to psychodynamic approaches, to explicitly systemic models.



**Figure 2 Theories and models**

### Approaches

#### *Hackman & Wageman (2005) typology*

This typology didn't serve particularly well in differentiating approaches to team and group work across the 36 coaches interviewed in this study. Almost half of respondents said that all four categories represented aspects of their practice; eclectic, process consultation, behavioural models and developmental coaching. On average participants named three of the four types in responding to the closed questions. Overall:

- 89% identified with process consultation.
- 78% identified with behavioural models
- 69% identified with developmental coaching
- 64% percent of coaches identified with eclectic

Of those who didn't describe their approach as eclectic, four coaches spoke of the important of evidence-based practice, interpreting 'eclectic' to mean a lack of rigour. All four of those coaches had a strong psychology background.



### *Qualitative analysis*

Nine concepts of team coaching emerged from the analysis of the responses to open questions. The nine concepts were grouped into two categories; process (task, relational, broad systemic, dialogic, developmental) and methodology (educational, behavioural, action learning and planned vs emergent). The planned vs emergent concept emerged as a spectrum of practice rather than a form of practice per se, with every practitioner's approach falling somewhere on a continuum from 'highly planned' to 'highly emergent'. Table 2 lists each of the concepts with examples of each.

Every coach except one referred to the need to pay attention to *process* (how the team is operating) as well as *content* (what team members are saying). Though nearly all coaches referred to process, different coaches used the word process to describe different aspects of how teams work together. Thirty five coaches used the word process when talking about the need for team to agree on key *tasks*; for example team purpose, team objectives, individual roles and responsibilities. Some coaches spoke about process exclusively in terms of task while other coaches also used the word in a *relational* sense, for example "*getting to the heart of the team as individuals and the deep connections between individuals.*" Most coaches referred to their approach as systemic, but only eight spoke explicitly of the need to adopt a *broad systemic* approach, attending to what happens outside the team, including the context in which the team operates and relationships between team members and others in the organisation. For example, one coach talked about the importance of identifying the expectations of multiple stakeholders and establishing touch-points with those stakeholders as part of their work. Five coaches made specific reference to *dialogue*, either using dialogue as an explicit framework for coaching or in terms of helping the team to understand the nature of dialogue and to engage in dialogue themselves. In responding to the open questions three made explicit reference to developmental frameworks, all referring to Tuckman's *forming-storming-norming-performing* framework.

Four concepts related to methodology rather than process. Twelve coaches described their role as being at least to some extent *educational*. Only one coach appeared to be exclusively educational. He described his approach as 'psycho-educational' and described his style as 'light-hearted and playful' and necessarily 'engaging'. Nine coaches described *behavioural* aspects to the way they worked, making time to observe the team in action and to provide feedback back to the team for them to reflect upon. Eight coaches made explicit reference to *action learning* methodologies, structuring their programs so that teams were asked to engage in 'real' work and learn from their experiences of engaging in that work. As noted above, every practitioner's approach could be charted somewhere on a spectrum from 'highly planned' to 'highly emergent'. Coaches to the left of that spectrum described step-by-step methodologies with clearly structured agendas.

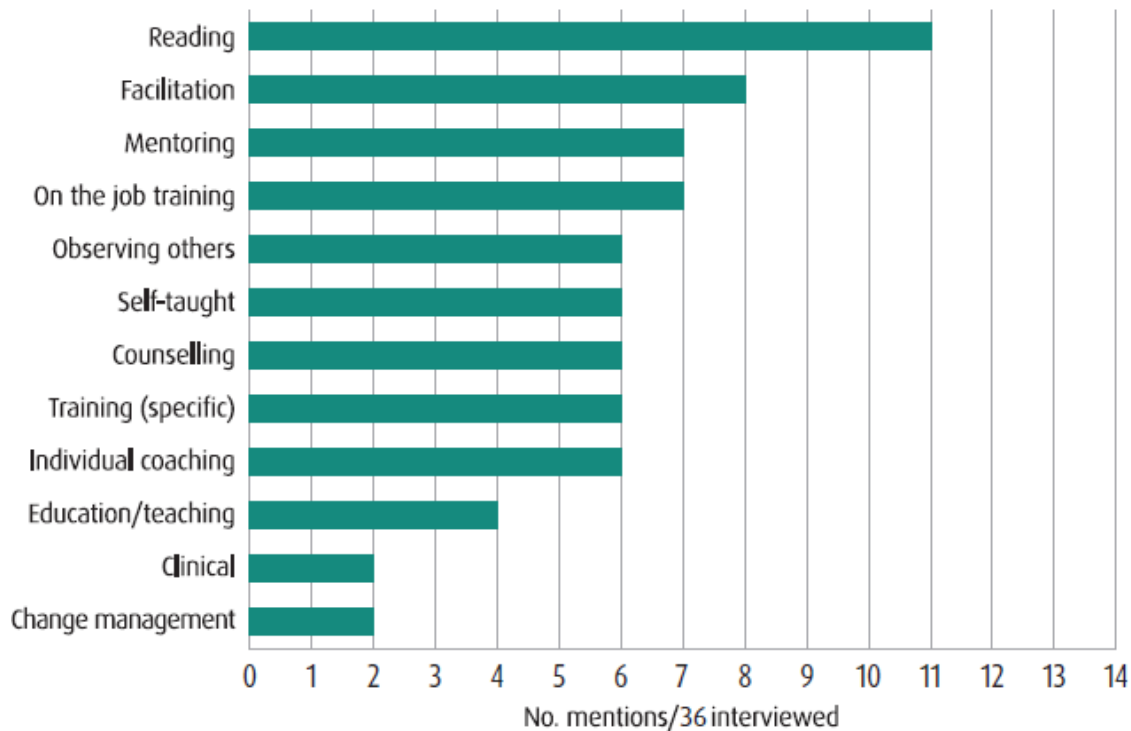
At the other end of the spectrum some coaches talked about walking into a session with no preconception as to what would take place, being open to what emerged through dialogue with team members. Other coaches sat somewhere in the middle, some talking about approaching a session as if it was going to be structured, then going with the flow. For example, "*I used to have everything mapped out, even though the conversation never went there. It gave me reassurance. Now I go in knowing how I want to start with options in my pocket.*"

**Table 2 Approaches to team coaching**

Categories & concepts	No. coaches	Quotes
<b>Process</b>		
<b>Task</b>	35	<i>"I like to start with the long term strategy – the third horizon. It puts team effectiveness into a context, which you must have. The work is always related to a business objective."</i>
<b>Relational</b>	17	<i>"We began with low trust, tension, no common purpose. For the first twelve months it was about building safety and understanding, how to read the room, understanding dialogue and their own propensities, getting it embedded."</i>
<b>Broad systemic</b>	8	<i>"Many coaches don't understand the interconnectedness [of what happens in the team] with the rest of the system, and the importance of helping the team to see itself as a system within a system."</i>
<b>Dialogic</b>	5	<i>"I was referred to work with a group of project managers and used dialogue. I got them to review in turn what they got from their regular meetings. Someone banged their first on their desk after about 20 minutes and said 'This is rubbish!', but we kept on going round the room, asking them to talk about what they wanted to get from each other. Another 20 minutes later the same person shouted out 'I've got it!' He was gobsmacked at what he learned from listening to others. Coaching is about having explicit permission to pay attention to everyone in the room."</i>
<b>Developmental</b>	3	<i>"Two teams merged into one and the new team needed to establish itself, to lead the new faculty. I got them focussed on their journey. Tuckman. What they wanted to feel/be like and their behaviours. They gelled and performed well. After 'forming' we did quarterly health-checks over the next two years."</i>
<b>Methodology</b>		
<b>Educational</b>	12	<i>"The educational piece is about giving leaders and their teams a cognitive framework to use with their teams. Their understanding of team dynamics is typically under-done."</i>
<b>Behavioural</b>	9	<i>"I observe the team in action and watch for 'teachable moments' when I'll give them feedback. We process how they might approach a situation differently, helping them understand how each [team member] is contributing."</i>
<b>Action learning</b>	8	<i>"I seek to build action learning into it. A way of demonstrating skill and capability, while helping them to become a team rather than a group. I do my coaching around action learning."</i>
<b>- Highly Planned</b>	n/a	<i>"We discuss the organizational mandate, then I talk about the possibilities in terms of adopting a peer coaching approach. We cover people's benefits and concerns. I teach GROW and establish agreement how we will use our time. Sometimes I'll do a coaching demonstration. I emphasise it's about the process not solving the problem. Then we do coaching followed by a debrief and evaluation. I was working with a team whose line manager thought they were low in EQ. We set up five sessions of four hours each to do skills development followed by coaching on how they would take the skill and apply it over the next week."</i>
<b>- Highly Emergent</b>	n/a	<i>"I don't go in with a set curriculum or program. It's about getting a brief from the leader, then getting started with the group. Starting a conversation about what people would like to work on. I have lots of processes and activities I can call upon. It's very organic and natural free formed."</i>

### Learning to coach

Only six coaches said they had received training specifically in team/group coaching, usually as a module or component of a broader program focussed more on individual coaching. More coaches learned through reading, facilitating, being mentored, observing others and/or learning on the job (figure 3).



**Figure 3 Learning to coach**

### Lessons learned & challenges facing new team coaches

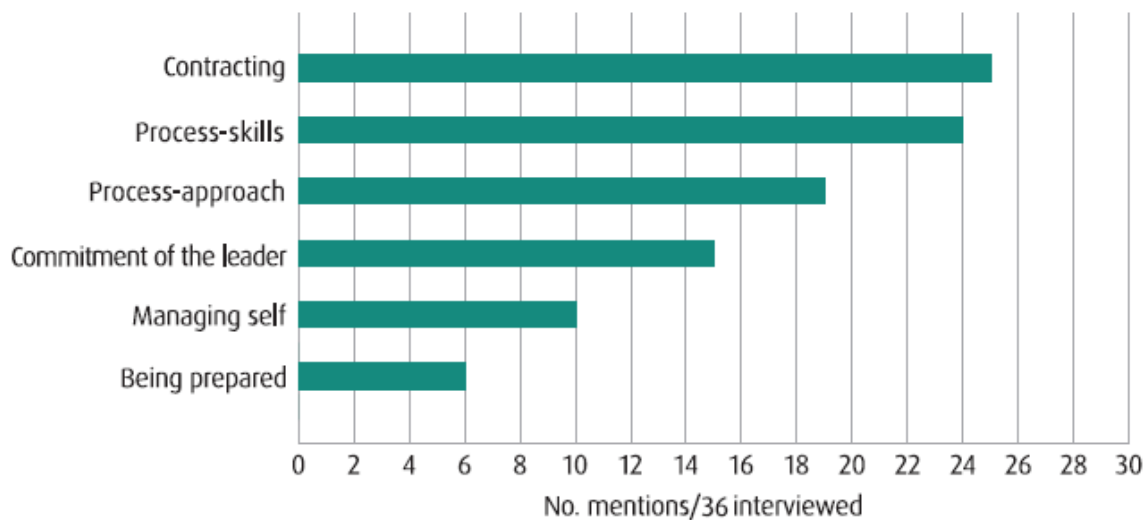
In naming lessons learned and outlining the challenges facing coaches new to team coaching, interviewees mentioned the importance of *contracting* most often (figure 4). They talked about the importance of identifying key stakeholders, making sure that desired outcomes are agreed upfront, and that a scope and process is agreed that both the client and the coach are happy with. Contracting meetings should be conducted face-to-face. Once the coach has contracted with the key stakeholder, he should then contract clearly and early on with everyone in the team or group.

Most agreed that you can't simply extrapolate an individualistic approach into a team setting because of the need to manage group *process*. Team coaching is more about process than it is about content and the new coach needs to educate himself in areas such as team dynamics, social psychology and ethnography. It is easy for the inexperienced coach to rely too heavily on pre-prepared agendas and on structure generally. Working with process is challenging; working in a complex and unpredictable environment where there is "*no place to hide*" and in which the coach may need to adapt quickly to what is happening in the room. Coaches talked about the importance of listening, of being patient and being comfortable at

times sitting with silence. They talked about the importance of knowing when to challenge and when to support. Coaches described different *approaches to process*. Some talked about the importance of focussing first on performance. Focusing on trust sounds good, said one coach, but most leaders are pragmatic and want to work on tangible outcomes. Another talked about attending to values early on, the importance of bring individual and collective values to the attention of the team so that they can address any value-conflict. The general lesson appears to be less around adopting a specific approach as to be confident in adopting an approach that the coach understands and has confidence in.

Aside from contracting, it is important for the coach to be convinced as to the genuine *commitment of the leader* to the process. Many of the stories that coaches told of interventions that didn't work well were traced back to the behaviour of the leader not supporting the intervention or changing his mind half way through.

Participants said that it's hard to manage team process without being good at *managing self*. Insecurity can show up in the way the coach operates, by becoming enmeshed in the system for example, or else seeking to push it away. Effective team coaches need to manage their egos and be open to learning. The coach may need to get used to years of never feeling completely confident and capable. Supervision is more important than it is for individual coaching because of the additional challenges experienced in managing oneself in such a complex environment. Some coaches also talked about the importance of *being prepared*, if not in terms of having a session mapped out and planned, in terms of having some ideas to call upon in the moment. "*I prepare a lot,*" said one coach, "*then I just step back and let it go.*"



**Figure 4 Lessons learned**

## Discussion

There is currently little agreement on how best to define team coaching and how to differentiate team coaching from other interventions, such as facilitation and process consulting. The results of this study go some way to show just how diverse contemporary approaches to team coaching are and to further frame the challenge of differentiating team coaching from other disciplines.

### *Different approaches to team coaching*

The results of this study suggest that above all team coaching is about managing process. The only coach who didn't mention process described an approach that sounded more like an experiential training program with an emphasis on teaching theory and practising new skills. However, in listening to coaches talk about process it became apparent that coaches were using the same words to mean quite different things. Nine dimensions of coaching practice emerged from this study; five relating to process and four relating directly to practice.

### *Process and Team Coaching*

Five different approaches to managing process emerged from the interviews, each of which can be referenced back to the literature.

#### 1. *Task*

Schein (1999) suggested there are three types of process for the interventionist to observe; boundary management, task, and interpersonal. Of these three types of process he suggested that task should be the consultant's primary focus, though he also says that interpersonal processes must also be attended to if the team is to be effective. The consultant should intervene on interpersonal process only when the team has explicitly agreed to work on interpersonal issues. Task in this context includes ensuring that individual's roles and responsibilities are clear, and that processes such as team meetings and decision making are attended to. The results of this study suggest that most coaches we spoke to would agree with Schein that task is an important aspect of process.

#### 2. *Relational*

Some coaches in this study echoed Schein's (1999) views, suggesting that the coach's primary role is to focus on task, but about half disagreed, making explicit reference to the need to pay attention also to interpersonal relationships. These coaches might support the views of Slobodnik & Wile (1999), who suggested that the only way to change a team's behaviour is to identify and modify the team social system, and Kets de Vries (2005, p.72), who defines the practitioner's main concern as being a focus on "*what is really going on in the intrapsychic and interpersonal world of the key players, below the surface of their day-to-day routines.*" Thornton's (2010) approach to group dynamics is highly relational and Martin (2006) suggested that Hackman & Wageman's (2005) model be amended to include relationship factors.

3. *Developmental*

Only three coaches in this study made explicit reference to developmental frameworks in response to the open questions, while 25 said their practice was in some way developmental when asked the closed questions. These results suggest that the developmental perspective isn't a primary concern for the majority of coaches we spoke to. Indeed none of the coaches we spoke to talked about explicitly designing interventions based on a diagnostic of the team's stage of development. Coaches more often referred to ways of inviting teams to focus on their history in a way that elicited dialogue. For example, some coaches spoke about asking teams to draw a timeline of their time together and to share stories about the team's development. These approaches are consistent with the idea that all teams have a history (Clutterbuck, 2013a) and the belief that one of the biggest barriers to team effectiveness may be its past history or traditions (Martin, 2006).

4. *Dialogic*

Five coaches made specific reference to dialogue, either using dialogue as an explicit framework for coaching or in terms of helping the team to understand the nature of dialogue and to engage in dialogue itself. Clutterbuck (2007), Hawkins (2011) and Thornton (2010) all refer explicitly to the importance of dialogue in coaching. Clutterbuck's (2007, p.77) earlier definition of team coaching included explicit reference to dialogue: "*Helping the team improve performance, and the processes by which performance is achieved, through reflection and dialogue.*" Hawkins (2011) writes about the coach's role in facilitating connections between the five team disciplines in terms of dialogue; the mission dialogue, the practice dialogue, the commissioner's dialogue, and the dynamic dialogue that teams need to engage in with other stakeholders. Thornton (2010) points to the role of dialogue in achieving mutual understanding. This focus on dialogue is echoed by other workers (e.g. Brown and Grant, 2013; Airo & Dahl, 2015) making reference to the work of Bohm (1996) and Isaacs (1999). The dialogic coach's role is to help the team reflect together upon the nature of their common challenge, empowering the team to set their own agenda. Kantor's (2012) early work on structural dynamics is cited by Isaacs (1999) and provides a lens and a language with which to view and talk about process in terms of dialogue.

5. *Broad systemic*

Eight coaches spoke explicitly of the need to attend to what happens outside the team as well as within the team, consistent with the work of both Hawkins (2011) and Thornton (2010). Though Hawkins (2011) suggests Clutterbuck doesn't place sufficient emphasis on relationships outside the team, Clutterbuck (2007) does suggest that the coach needs to engage in 'systemic thinking', mapping out the various factors of presenting issues including an analysis of all the people who have an influence on that issue. Stoffels (2015) cites the value of bring the wider system into the room, for example inviting other members of the system into team coaching sessions.

These five approaches to coaching all represent different ways of thinking about and working with process, none of which are mutually exclusive.

## Methodology and Team Coaching

Four more approaches to team coaching describe define coaching in terms of practice models.

### 1. *Educational*

Twelve coaches interviewed in this study said that one of their roles was to bring new theory and insights to the team. Eleven percent of coaches interviewed talked about having learned aspects of team coaching through their experience of teaching or education more generally. Hackman & Wageman (2005), Clutterbuck (2007) and Hawkins (2011) all position learning as an important element of team development and indeed most writers ascribe an educational role to the team coach (Farmer, 2016). Thornton (2010), on the other hand, implies that skills development is more the realm of training, that team coaching is more appropriate for training follow-up, helping people to embed skills and reflect with each other on progress.

### 2. *Behavioural*

Hackman & Wageman (2005) cite the approaches of Schwarz and Komaki as examples of team coaching based on theories of individual behaviour. Schwarz' approach consisted of three stages; i) observing behaviour, ii) providing feedback, iii) helping the team to decide whether or not they want to change their behaviours based on feedback received. Komaki's approach is more inherently didactic, comprising i) providing instructions on how to behave, ii) monitoring performance, iii) explaining to the team the consequences of their behaviour. None of the coaches interviewed in this study positioned such a structured behavioural approach at the heart of their practice, though 78% said they spent at least some time observing the team in action and providing feedback.

### 3. *Planned*

Clutterbuck (2008) suggests that team coaching is different to team facilitation in that the facilitator leads a team through a structured process, a 'directed' dialogue, whereas the team coach more often involves an emergent dialogue. Coaches in this study showed up somewhere on a spectrum from 'methodical' to 'emergent'. Many coaches seemed adaptable, having a structured approach to hand if required, but often making decisions in-the-moment to go with the energy of the team. This flexible approach appears consistent with Thornton's (2010) approach, in which the extent to which the team coach is structured depends on the degree to which the team or group feels secure. If the team or group is not feeling safe and secure then the coach may be wise to structure a session, providing team members with clear sight as to what's going to happen. As team members become more confident, so the team coach may facilitate a more emergent process.

### 4. *Action learning*

Reg Revans defined action learning as a social process in which a group of people learn from each other's experiences. Action learning is often defined specifically as a group intervention rather than a team intervention (e.g. Clutterbuck, 2007; Thornton, 2010), but some of the coaches interviewed spoke about adapting the process for team use.

### ***Differentiating team coaching from other forms of intervention***

In reviewing these different approaches to coaching it must also be considered how to distinguish team coaching from other forms of intervention. It's relatively easy to differentiate between team coaching and training or team building. Training, even experiential training, is essentially didactic without an explicit focus on process or systems. Team building is often described as a one-off event or series of events, usually dissociated from the team task. Team building workshops usually focus specifically on helping team members get on well together and rarely address performance directly (Clutterbuck, 2008). It's harder to differentiate between team coaching, facilitation and process consulting.

Clutterbuck (2008) distinguishes between team coaching and facilitation on two dimensions. First, team facilitation is more structured than team coaching. Second, team coaching is educational; the ultimate aim is to help the team develop the capacity to coach itself. Hawkins (2011) also turns to structure to differentiate between the two interventions; facilitators manage the team's process so the team can focus on task, while the coach enables the team to recognise and modify its own process. Not everyone would agree with these distinctions. Stewart (2007, p.420) cites different perspectives on facilitation concluding that "... all describe the role of facilitator as responsible for helping the group increase its effectiveness by improving its process and neutral in the content of the group's decisions and solutions." Furthermore, she cites Schwarz, who points to the developmental role of the facilitator, working with a team over a period of time, helping it to correct its own process without the facilitator's help. Regardless of what the team coaches may think then, there appear to be plenty of facilitators who see their role as both educational and process focussed. It may not be surprising then that we see the terms coaching and facilitation used interchangeably in the literature (Brown & Grant, 2009).

Hawkins (2011) defines process consulting as a form of facilitation in which the consultant helps the team to review and reflect upon task process. He suggests that the team coach uses less problematic language than does the process consultant and balances a problem focus with an appreciative focus of what is already working well. Hackman & Wageman (2005), on the other hand, position process consulting explicitly as an approach to team coaching, an interpretation that seems to sit easiest with Schein's (1999, p.20) definition of process consultation, with its emphasis on process and outcome achievement:

*Process consultation is the creation of a relationship with the client that permits the client to perceive, understand, and act on the process events that occur in the client's internal and external environment in order to improve the situation as defined by the client.*

Schein (1999) appears to use the terms facilitation and coaching as forms of process consulting. He calls process consulting with teams 'facilitation', and process consultation with individuals 'coaching' (Brown & Grant, 2009).

In summary, there seem to be no generally accepted distinctions between team coaching, team facilitation and process consultation. Attempts to create these distinctions with reference to factors such as structure, capacity development or positive psychology are especially unconvincing when regarded from a contextual perspective. Coaching generally, says Clutterbuck (2007), is multifaceted, multidimensional and highly variable according to purpose and context. The provider of team coaching services may be better off seeking to



understand the client's needs and recommending an intervention accordingly, than spending too much time attempting to argue conceptual distinctions between different ways of working with teams.

### ***Learning to coach teams***

Only six of the coaches spoken to said they had received training specifically in team/group coaching, either as a short component of a broader program focussed more on individual coaching, or through being trained as a group facilitator in a therapeutic context. Most spoke of learning on-the-job, coming to team coaching with individual coaching and/or facilitation experience and learning with the direct support of more experienced team coaches or the support of experienced mentors. Clutterbuck (2008, p.220) appears to dismiss the credentials of a team coach whose practice is based primarily on individual coaching experience together with a “*dash of facilitation and or team building*”. Yet given that team coaching is still on the “*nursery slopes*” in terms of developing an extensive research base (Hawkins, 2014, p.239) and that there still exist only a few clearly evidence-based team coaching programs around the world, it would seem unwise not to extract whatever learnings we can from the experience of this first generation of team coaches. It will take time, after all, to build evidence based training programs given that the existing evidence base remains sparse.

In the meantime the demand for team coaching is growing fast (Hawkins, 2014) and the onus is on prospective team coaches to prepare themselves as best they can. Evidence from this study, combined with the available literature, suggests a development pathway for individual coaches to include the following:

- A basic understanding of dialogue, as described by Isaacs (1999), Kantor (2012) and others. Developing a good understanding of dialogue is something the prospective team coach can focus on immediately, working with stakeholders engaged in individual assignments.
- Thinking systemically, the coach becoming familiar with the literature around systems theory, complex adaptive systems and complexity theory, and putting into practice that understanding again working with stakeholders engaged in individual assignments.
- Working with teams and groups, developing facilitation skills that will prove useful, particularly when working with task.
- Working with teams and groups, developing educational skills, learning how to explain new ideas and concepts clearly and effectively.
- Learning some approaches to working with team and/or group dynamics, developing the confidence and ability to work with team relationships when appropriate.

Supervision would appear to be a particularly powerful intervention for coaches to consider in this area, especially for those coaches living at locations where limited training options exist and given that many experienced coaches are used to seeking supervision from supervisors living overseas (Lawrence & Whyte, 2014).

### **Further research**

In this study we spoke to 36 coaches, most of who live and coach only in Australia/New Zealand. Were we to extend our study to other geographies then we would no doubt come across other approaches to team coaching and discover other pathways to becoming a team coach. Whilst there exist few training options for team coaches based in this part of the world,

some of the authors cited in this article do provide longitudinal training offerings, in the UK and other parts of the world. Another limitation of this study is that we chose to target people who we knew to be coaches, who we understood also do team coaching. Given the lack of clear distinction between team coaching, facilitation and process consultation, we may have overlooked a whole population of practitioners working effectively in the team space without referring to themselves as 'coaches'. Future studies may cast their nets wider to explore the practices of anyone working in the team/group domain, regardless of title. In planning future research it may be wise to put aside for a while the desire to draw firm lines between team coaching and other group interventions, and seek out what may have already been learned across a broadly defined field of practice.

Other key areas for future research include further exploring what makes an effective team and the extent to which identifying different types of team will prove useful. In the intervention space, seeking to establish what constitutes an effective intervention and in what context will require a lot more research, both qualitative and quantitative. Hawkins (2014) suggests a good place to start is with the publication of more case studies. As we continue to refine our understanding in both these areas, so we may also continue to research the evolution of an effective team coach. Looking beyond the design of formal training interventions, what kinds of experience appear to provide the most effective learning environment? Such insights may guide the industry in building more training offerings for team coaches specifically, rather than treating team coaching as discrete modules in training interventions designed primarily to teach individual coaching.

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