

Making teams work

Professor Peter Hawkins (Renewal Associates), John Leary-Joyce (AoEC) and Hilary Lines have been defining the concept of team coaching.



Could a systemic approach be the way forward?

The last five years has seen an enormous growth in team coaching, which prior to 2011 had been noticeable by its absence from most coaching conferences, research reports and literature. In 2013 the large annual coaching reports started to focus on it almost for the first time.

Lynne Chambers who has been the head of learning and development for a number of large organisations wrote in the Ridler Report, 2013: 7:

I think the whole area of team-based coaching is going to grow significantly in our organisation and coaches need to be agile at dealing with the shift from individual to group work, including all the boundary sensitivities and interpersonal issues that this shift may bring. (Ridler Report, 2013: 7)

The same year the Sherpa report said:
Team coaching is a newer concept. Large firms have not yet taken the lead in the design and development of team coaching

Executive coaches, both internal and external, are presented with a rather large opportunity. Are they really taking advantage of it? (Sherpa Report, 2012: 9).

Team development and team building have been around for many years in the field of organisation development, however, team coaching is still in its early developmental stage of maturity, similar to where individual coaching was about 30 years ago. This stage is characterised by: lack of clear definitions of terms; creation of confusion for buyers on the different types of team coaching and the benefits of each; and a lack of defined standards for either team coaches or team coaching training. There is still confusion between group coaching (being the coaching of individuals in a group setting), individual coaching of members of the same team, and team coaching where the focus is on the team as a collective entity, and the intervention spans a period of time. We have heard the term 'team coaching' used to apply to each of these approaches.

In the last six years the three of us have worked both individually and collectively in developing greater clarity in the definitions, practice, methods and training in team coaching. Much of this we have published (Hawkins 2011 & 2014; Hawkins 2014B; Hawkins and Leary-Joyce 2014; Lines and Scholes-Rhodes 2013) and continued to develop in both short certificate programmes and one-year diploma programmes which we have run in the UK and in many countries round the world, including USA, Kenya, Turkey, South Africa, China, Australia, Hungary.

In our work we have also gone further in attempting to provide clarity between different forms of team coaching (Hawkins 2014:72-82), showing these on a continuum from team facilitation, to team coaching, to leadership team coaching, to what we have termed Systemic Team Coaching.

The Extended Team Coaching Continuum



We believe that it is "Systemic Team Coaching" which is the most needed by today's organisations and where there is the largest shortage of experienced practitioners. We define Systemic Team Coaching as:

A process by which a team coach works with a whole team, both when they are together and when they are apart, in order to help them improve both their collective performance and how they work together, and also how they develop their collective leadership to more effectively engage with all their key stakeholder groups to jointly transform the wider business. (Hawkins 2014: 80)

What makes Systemic Team Coaching most valuable to businesses today is that it enables the team to reframe and enhance the way it relates to and serves its business environment, which means placing as much emphasis on how it leads change with its stakeholders as how it functions internally. Therefore, rather than just focussing on the team's internal relationships and functioning, (the focus of much 'team building' work) the systemic team coach works with the team and its members to build their collective leadership, helping them to co-create value in their engagement with their stakeholders. These include the commissioners of the team; the investors; those that the team leads; the customers and suppliers of the team; the communities in which it operates and the more than human world the team depends upon. This approach recognises that the biggest challenges in nearly all organisations today lie not inside the individuals, teams or even departments, but in the connections between them. Working well as a team when the team is together is an important first step to every team member being able to represent the whole team effectively when they engage with the team's stakeholders.

We have continued through our own practice and trainings to constantly innovate and refine what we have termed 'Systemic Team Coaching' and have continued to publish what has emerged (Hawkins 2014 and Hawkins edited 2014).

The Five Disciplines Model

In developing Systemic Team Coaching we reviewed all the best research on team performance that we could find including Katzenbach and Smith (1993 & 1999); Clutterbuck (2007); Kets de Fries (2005 & 2011); Wageman et al (2008); West (2012). From this research and from reviewing in depth the practice of ourselves and our colleagues, Peter developed the Hawkins Five Disciplines Model of Team Effectiveness. This model proposes that to be effective teams need to have mastered all five disciplines and that systemic team coaching needs to be able to coach teams both within each discipline and on connecting these disciplines.

1. Commissioning

Are we clear about what our stakeholders are requiring from us? That may be the board, the investors, the customers, communities in which we operate - so the commission comes from a number of sources and so you have to be very careful about the stakeholder/s that you are not noticing. For example, BP didn't realise that the fisherman of the East Coast of America were an important stakeholder before it was too late. Commission is all about understanding WHY we are here, and this is determined by the stakeholders that we work with.

2. Clarifying

Receiving a clear commission from your stakeholder/s is not enough. A great team creates its own sense of collective endeavour- what are we here to achieve that we can't achieve by working in parallel? What are the KPI's of the leadership team? Not just our individual KPI's, but our collective goals and roles? How do we not only run our functions, but contribute to the whole? Clarifying is all about WHAT are we going to do.

3. Co-creating

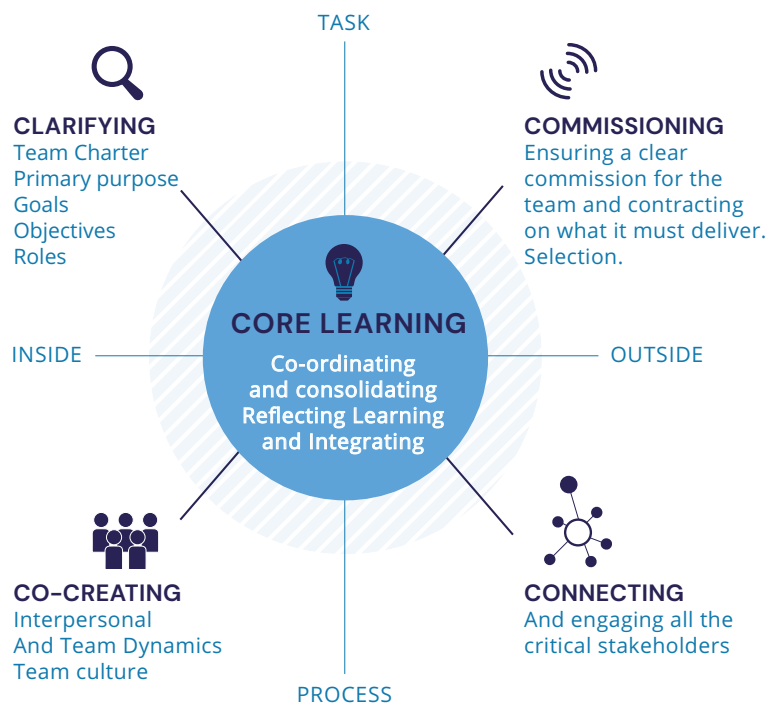
How do we work together in a way that is generative? How do we have meetings where we are not just exchanging pre-cooked thoughts, but we're generating new thinking that none of us had before we came into the room?

4. Connecting

Great teams are not just ones that have great internal meetings and relate well together. Where teams create real value is in how they engage externally with all their stakeholders (customers, suppliers, investors, sponsors, communities and the wider environment). It is also important that each team member is able to represent the whole team and not just their function when engaging externally.

5. Core learning

How does the whole team develop and learn, not just the individuals within it? How does a team take time out to reflect on its development? To ask how does it grow its collective capacity? And how does it become a source of individual stretch and development for its members?



We have developed several 360 degree feedback questionnaires for teams to give and receive feedback on their performance in each of these five disciplines. The first of these was with Bath Consultancy Group, a later version was published in Hawkins 2014B; and the latest on-line version has been developed by John Leary-Joyce and Peter Hawkins for AoEC called Team Connect 360 and is available from www.aoec.com. These provide data on how the team sees itself, how the stakeholders see it and also both groups' aspirations for the team that the systemic team coach and the team can jointly explore and use to co-design the team coaching journey. The questionnaires can also be used to evaluate and re-design the team coaching after six months, nine months or a year. The Team Connect 360 on-line tool is a licenced product and only available on completion of the 3-day AoEC Systemic Team Coaching Certificate programme.

Systemic team coaching is never just a series of events or away-days, but an on-going development journey which continues even when the team coach is not present.

It may involve off-site events, the team coach providing process consultancy to the team's regular meetings, or attending stakeholder engagement events. It may also involve some individual coaching of team members focussed on how they can develop their contribution to the team's effectiveness. This is particularly important for the team leader. Combining individual coaching as part of the collective team coaching requires careful contracting with the whole team and clear boundary management (Hawkins 2014: 243).

Training in Systemic Team Coaching

The western world is not short of external and internal individual coaches, nor of facilitators or trainers. What is desperately needed is systemic coaches who can combine a mastery in coaching and partnering skills with the development to work at depth combining attention to the individual, team, inter-team, organisation and wider systemic levels. To train such systemic team coaches is not just about them learning the models mentioned above; not just about learning the tools for each of the five disciplines and when and how to apply them; not just about shifting one's focus from individuals to the team as a collective entity; but most importantly developing the ability and capacity to both think and be systemic.

To make this shift we engage our programme participants in a development journey of three core interrelated parts:

1. The 'what' of systemic team coaching: This involves developing a new set of lenses through which to see a team and its challenges in a systemic way; and developing clarity about the role of the coach as a facilitator of change within this system.
2. The 'how' of systemic team coaching: Here the coach develops a broad repertoire of tools to help the team develop excellence in the Five Disciplines. The focus is on building expertise and versatility so that the coach has a range of approaches on which to draw to suit different situations and cultures.

3. The 'who' of systemic team coaching: In some ways the most demanding of the three, this requires the coach constantly to develop and hone their personal ability to tune into systemic pattern and to use this ability to best help the team. This is also about building resilience: the greatest value that a systemic team coach can bring often lies in mirroring and challenging existing patterns of behaviour. This requires the ability to create the space where tension can be addressed constructively in order to create leadership value.

Our three-day certificate programme invites participants to start this development process, providing a firm foundation in the core concepts and approaches and applying these with either a live team or our carefully constructed team simulation. It also forms the training and licence to deliver and debrief the Team Connect 360 diagnostic.

The one-year diploma programme deepens, refines and strengthens team coaching practice by accompanying students as they apply the approaches in an on-going relationship with a team client over the course of the year. The programme encourages constant learning through new input, experimentation, feedback, reflection and supervision of practice in live client cases and by working within an intense learning community, which provides learning and application in multi-level systemic thinking.

We have been greatly privileged to share these programmes with highly skilled and resourceful groups in many parts of the world, and there has not been one certificate programme or diploma module that has not taught us something new.

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