Coaching, Mentoring and Organizational Consultancy: Supervision and Development

Peter Hawkins and Nick Smith, Open University Press, London, 2007.

An Extract from Chapter 4 'Team Coaching'

A team coach has to start by engaging the team in some form of mutual diagnosis of the critical areas that the team needs to focus on, to become more effective. For this we use the CLEAR model (see Chapter 2 for further discussion). In this extract we will develop it for team coaching.

Coaching teams: The CLEAR process

When working as a consultant to teams, the role is very similar to being a team coach, where the client or coachee is the collective functioning and well-being of the team. As in individual coaching, we can use the CLEAR stages of Contracting, Listening, Exploring, Action, Review. Also, as in individual coaching, this flow is never just linear, since we cycle back into contracting before and after the listening phases and again throughout the repeated cycles of exploration and action.

C&L: Contracting and Listening

In team coaching the contracting and listening phases are more intertwined, and the team coach needs to operate several cycles where they listen and gradually contract. This often has three stages:

1. initial exploratory discussions;
2. some form of diagnosis;
3. sharing the diagnosis and contracting the hoped-for outcomes from the change process.

1. Initial exploratory discussions

Often as a consultant one will be called in by a team leader and/or individuals, who have a specific brief to support the team's development. The work begins right from these initial discussions, but it is important not to confuse these early talks to some of the team members, with a full contracting process with the whole team. Useful questions at this stage include:

- Why do you want help with team development now? Tell me some of the history that has led up to it.
- Why me/us? Who else are you talking to?
- Whose idea was it? Is everyone in agreement about it?
- Have you had help with team development before? What worked and what could have been better?
- What can not be talked about in this team?
- How would you know that this development work had been successful?

Petrushka Clarkson (1995) has a useful notion that teams often come for help because they are either in danger, conflict, confusion or deficit and depending on which of these are relevant, there are knee-jerk reactions that the consultant should avoid and more appropriate and considered responses that can help (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Reactions and responses

Diagnosis	Consultant's knee-jerk reaction	Consultant's considered response
Danger 坎	Teach Falsely reassure Rescue Contract unrealistically	Listen Acknowledge feelings Explore sources Explore nature *Elicit emotional reality*
Confusion 明夷	Get sucked into confusion Oversimplify Accept one frame of reference Fight Take sides	Restrain action Clarify issues Clarify roles Clarify authority Provide models and maps Explore options Assess impact/consequences
Conflict 訟	Pathologise it *Fear it* Minimise it Ignore it Take sides	Learn its history Welcome and understand it Model conflict handling Value the differences Validate all parties *Provide arena and referee*
Deficit 困	Do it for them Work with solved problems Solve symptoms Give your favourite package Assume there should be a training solution	Establish what they have Find what worked before Find out what *did* not work Start where they are Establish needs and wants Provide relevant input

Ref: Clarkson P (1995) *Change in organisations,* Whurr.

2. Diagnosing team functioning

The diagnostic phase might take place when the consultant has individual semi-structured meetings with each member of the team, and/or sends out a questionnaire that asks each person for their perceptions on the team and what is needed. Also at this stage it can be useful to have additional conversations with some of the key stakeholders with whom the team interacts. Often, when working with a senior executive team, we will also interview the Chair of the Board and collect feedback from the tier of management that reports to this senior team. Sometimes we will also use diagnostic instruments and questionnaires, such as Belbin team role analysis (www.belbin.com/belbin-team-roles) or our own team effectiveness questionnaire (www.bathconsultancygroup.com) where each team member is asked to rate on a five-point scale their view of 15 aspects of team functioning, both how it is currently and what it needs to be for the team to succeed.

The data from these sources needs to be sorted and analysed – not to arrive at definitive conclusions about the team, but to develop emerging hypotheses and gain a sense of where it is most important for the team to focus. To carry out this analysis we have developed a framework for addressing the various aspects of effective team functioning.

Our model first divides the key aspects of effective functioning into four quadrants, using the axis of focus (from 'task' to 'purpose') and the axis of context (from 'inner focus' to 'outer focus').

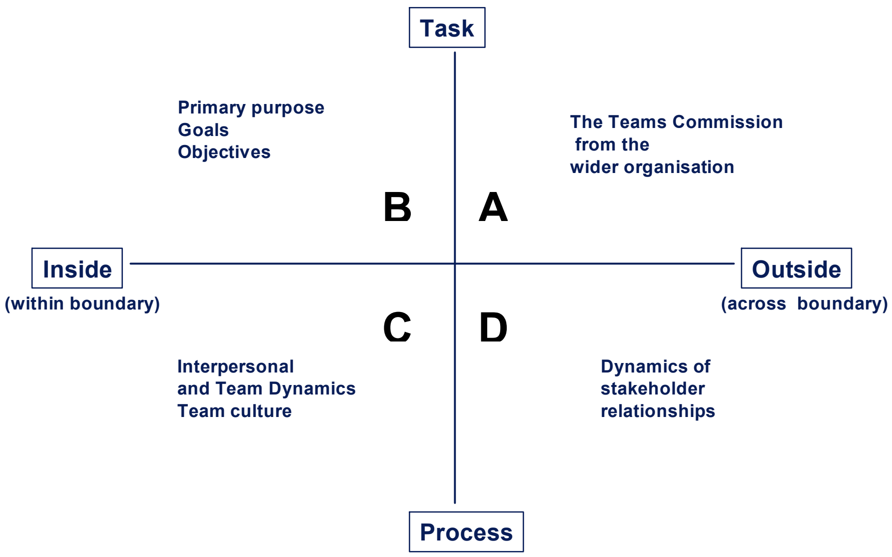


Figure 4.1 Team coaching model 1

Quadrant A: Outer Task Focus

Similar to Katzenbach and Smith (1993), we believe it is essential for an effective team to have clarity of mission and purpose. This is located on the horizontal axis near the 'outer focus', in the sense that purpose, mission and higher order objectives will nearly always involve some dialogue and commissioning with external bodies. In the case of a senior executive team, they will need to agree their purpose with the Board, the Board with the shareholders, and so on.

Quadrant B: Inner Task Focus

The effective team does not just rely on the commissioning given to it, but takes its agreed mission into collective ownership and works out how to succeed in delivering it and sets out an agreed timetable. It has a shared strategic work plan to which they hold each other mutually accountable. As part of this process they need to decide what the issues are that the whole team needs to jointly own, what can be done by sub-groups of the team and what can be delegated to individual team members – with the team engaged in the roles of reviewing, supporting and challenging.

Quadrant C: Internal process, relationships and culture

This comprises how the team functions and works together, the team roles and processes and the interpersonal relationships. It also includes the team culture, its habituated ways of doing things, its collective mindsets, its emotional climate and core motivations (for further material on organizational culture see Chapter 5).

Quadrant D: External relationships with key stakeholders

Teams often confuse being an effective team with what takes place in team meetings. We sometimes point out that what happens in their meetings is like what happens on the training ground in sport – the game is not won or lost there. It is won in the quality of the myriad relationships, which the team members have on behalf of the team with all the important stakeholders, not by focusing on the training pitch of team meetings. We have pioneered team 360º feedback processes, which are not focused on team members, but on how the team is collectively viewed by all its critical stakeholders, including of course its own team members. This kind of procedure enables the team to fine-tune its performance and improve its relationship with critical stakeholders. (We will specify this process further in Chapter 6).

Each of the quadrants in our model is affected by a mixture of history, developmental stage of the team in its organizational environment and changes in the wider social context. Particular ways in which these influences bear on each other are shown in Figure 4.2.

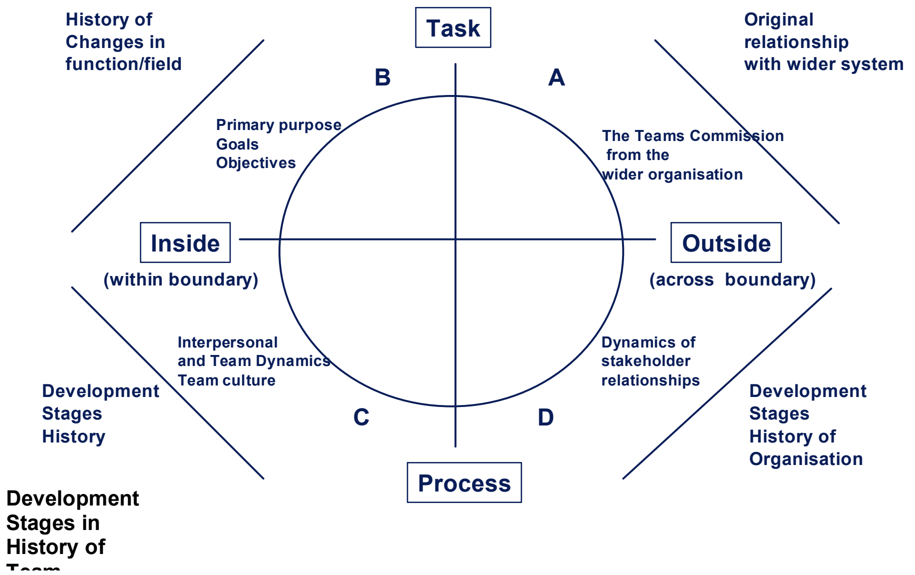


Figure 4.2 Team coaching model 2

Having used the team coaching model as a way of clarifying team functioning, we go on to use the CLEAR model as a way of structuring the intervention. Each of the quadrants offers different ways of intervening in each of the stages of the CLEAR model.

C2: Contracting the outcomes

Having carried out some form of diagnostic listening and analysis, it is important to find a way of playing this back to the whole team, in a way that engages them not in either swallowing whole or rejecting the feedback, but as co-diagnosers of its meaning. So instead of the team coach feeding the results back in the form of a beautifully crafted report that is so polished that no one can grasp hold of it, it is better to do so in a way which is full of hooks and intriguing entry points. The purpose is not just to ‘tell it as it is’ (necessary though that is), but also to create a real energy of engagement.

Having arrived at a shared view of the current state of the team and what is the required difference the team wants to create, we engage the team members in exploring what they want to achieve from the team development activity and specifically, what success would look like. Sometimes we ask the team to work together to answer the following three questions:

- ‘This event/process would be a success for us as a team if…’
- ‘This event/process would be a success for our organization if…’
- ‘This event/process would be a success for our clients/stakeholders if…’

We then ask what they need both from each other and from us as consultants or facilitators of the team in order to achieve that success.

Successful contracting involves both 'starting with the end in mind' and the ability to ask intentionally naive questions, such as the ones used in the initial discussions above and in addition:

- 'What is the purpose of your meetings?'
- 'What do you expect from one another?'
- 'How would you know if this team coaching had been successful for you?'
- 'What specifically would be happening differently?'

Clear contracting is not only important for the success of the team coaching, but it also models the way team members can contract among themselves, both about how they meet, but also how each person can be pro-active in negotiating with the team their individual needs and those of their function.

E: Explore

Once a clear contract for the team development and coaching has been established, the work moves on into the EXPLORE stage of the CLEAR model, where the issues that have emerged in the contracting stage can be opened up and worked on. In this section we give examples of exploratory interventions for each of the four quadrants of the team development model. We would select from these depending on the needs of the particular team.

If, from the contracting stages, it becomes clear that there is a lack of clarity in the fundamental mission of the team, we would probably suggest a workshop with the team to clarify it and then also a joint meeting with the department responsible for commissioning the team's purpose, to clarify mutual expectations. When doing research on leadership challenges in the Civil Service, a number of people commented on how:

> '…the real leadership challenge lies at the interface between the politicians and the senior civil servants.'

This is the 'commissioning interface' (Quadrant A). If the team had a clear commission from the wider organization, but still lacked clarity of objectives, goals and plan, the explore stage would focus on turning the mission into clarity of team strategic plan (Quadrant B).

Other teams may well need to focus on their internal relationships and team dynamics (Quadrant C), while others on the relationships with their key stakeholders (Quadrant D).

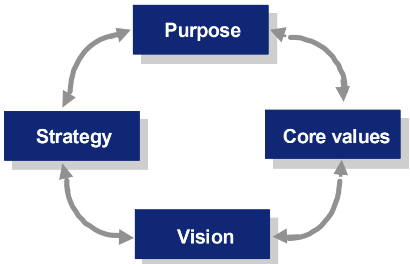
We will now give brief examples of how team coaching 'explore' interventions in each of the four quadrants.

Explore: Quadrant A interventions ('Team Mission or Commission')

In order to show what an 'explore' intervention would look like in this quadrant we need to see how we would get a team to clarify its mission.

When working with the formation of Capespan, from the merger of Outspan and Unifruco (Cape Fruit) in South Africa, we held team workshops for the Board and Senior Executive teams to jointly co-create their mission. This ensured a great diversity of perspectives from executives and non-executives, from each of the legacy companies, and included board members who were fruit growers and therefore suppliers, executives who ran the core business in South Africa and also those who ran the international marketing entities. This wider attendance also ensured fuller ownership of the outcomes.

The mission of an organization, department or team is the overarching framework in which strategising takes place. Our model of the organization mission is based on work by a number of key writers in the field (Senge *et al.* 2005; Binney *et al.* 2005). We introduced this model to Capespan by showing how its aspects interweave with each other and how we make best use of it as an exploratory tool.



PURPOSE is WHY we are in business, our 'raison d'etre' – the difference we wish to make in the world.

STRATEGY is WHAT we focus on, our core markets, competencies and geographies, also our unique value propositions and how we differentiate our organization from the competition.

CORE VALUES underpin HOW we do business, the principles and behaviours that distinguish how we relate within the business as well as to our customers and suppliers.

VISION is WHAT WE COULD BECOME if we were successful at fulfilling our purpose, focus our strategy and live in-line with our core values.

Figure 4.3 The mission of an organization

We then invited the team members from both the Board and executive team to complete the following statements.

1. 'The **primary purpose** of our organization is to ...'
2. 'The key **core values** of our organization that guide how things are done are...'
3. **Strategy –** 'Our organization focuses on...'

   'Its unique competencies that distinguish it from others in this field are...'
4. **Vision –** 'If our organization was miraculously successful in achieving its purpose, carrying out its strategy and living out its core values, what we would see hear and feel in two years time would be...'.

The important thing about the answers that the team members generate is that they maximise the diversity of views; that each view builds on the others; and ends with a jointly created document.

Some Boards we have worked with have preferred the executive team to produce their mission statement and then allow the non-executives to critically challenge and amplify what has been produced.

In other settings the executive team and the Board have worked separately on their mission statement, as well as their expectations and feedback to the other group. From these parallel explorations, a dialogue between the two groups was then facilitated to produce a third mission statement that is more than the sum of the two parts. This produces a good deal of learning for both groups.

Explore: Quadrant B interventions ('From Mission to Plan')

For quadrant B, we would focus on turning the mission into a road map. Having arrived at a clear and truly agreed mission, the executive team at Capespan needed to turn this into a clear action plan. The key questions that we posed as team coaches at this stage were:

- How are we going to fulfil our purpose, in the area of our strategic focus, staying true to our core values, in a way that will move us towards our vision?
- What are the milestones and scorecard by which we can chart progress towards our goals?
- What are the key strategic activities that:
  - we need to own as a whole team;
  - we need to allocate to small sub-groups of the team or project teams;
  - we need to allocate to individual team members?
- How do we have the team focus on business as usual and also focus on the core activities of making the merger successful.

Explore: Quadrant C interventions (‘Team Culture’)

To intervene in quadrant C, we would focus upon the way the team relates and what blocks or supports getting to the agreed goals. Teams that work regularly and intensively together need to take regular time away from the pressures of front-line work in order to stand back and look at how they are individually and collectively functioning, and how they relate to the wider system in which they operate. This may take the form of an away-day, or a team-development workshop, or sessions with an outside team coach, or it may be part of a larger organizational change and development programme.

Which ever way a team or group decides to manage their own dynamics, it is important to remember that the time to start focusing on what is happening in the process is when things are going well and not to wait until the group or team is in a crisis. When the levels of conflict, hurt and fear rise, it becomes much more difficult to see what is happening and to take the risk of making changes. However, for some teams it is only when they hit a crisis that they create the motivation to face what is happening, since sometimes ‘crises create the heat in which new learning can be forged’ (Hawkins 1986).

When working with one executive team in a large financial company, we asked the team members to complete the following questions separately and then share their answers.

- ‘The unwritten rules of this group are...’
- ‘What I find hard to admit about my work in this team is...’
- ‘What I think we avoid talking about here is...’
- ‘What I hold back on saying about other people here is...’
- ‘The hidden agendas that this group carries are...’
- ‘We are at our best when…’
- ‘What interrupts us from being at our best is…’

This was followed by each person receiving feedback from all the other team members on what they have appreciated and found difficult about his or her contribution to the team.

Then each person had the opportunity to say what they have most appreciated and found most difficult about the team as a whole. This provides the beginnings of three lists – what the group values and needs to build on; what it wants to change; what is missing and needs to be introduced. (See action stage below).

In other teams we have also used more active exploration of team dynamics, such as sculpting the team, or creating a team constellation. (For more information on team sculpting see Hawkins and Shohet 2006). Interventions like this create more clarity and more open communication between team members and move this communication from neutral data to also include emotions and feelings.

Explore: Quadrant D interventions ('Dynamics of Stakeholder Relationships')

Intervening in quadrant D we focus on how the team relates to stakeholders across the various organizational boundaries. As in individual supervision, where mode 7 focuses on the wider, social and organizational context in which the work operates, it is also important to focus on the context that surrounds the boundary of the team.

As mentioned above, we have pioneered team 360-degree feedback processes, encouraging its critical stakeholders to state how they viewed the team, including its own team members, and these are discussed under 'evaluation' in Chapter 6. Where possible, as team coaches, we coach the team in engaging directly with inquiry conversations with their key stakeholders

When working with a large venture capital and private equity company where we and our colleagues acted as coaches to all the company's teams, we asked each team to clarify their critical stakeholders. Then the team collectively prioritised them and arranged for team members, either individually or in pairs, to go and interview representatives of those with the highest priority. The team members then brought their findings to an off-site team workshop ready to make a presentation. We then explained that we wanted them to role-play the stakeholders they interviewed, while the rest of the team role-played themselves, inviting the stakeholder into a team meeting to give feedback. This role-played feedback provided much richer data than they had prepared in the notes they thought they were going to present.

At the end of the feedback session, the team was expecting to thank the role-played stakeholder for their feedback and then leave the room. But at this point we moved towards the surprise second part of the process. We asked them while still in role to say what they would be talking about in the corridor, supposedly out of earshot, about the meeting in which they had just taken part. Then we asked the team playing themselves to do the same. This enactment provided second order feedback on the dynamic relationship between the two parties. Those role-playing the stakeholders made comments such as:

- 'They were being polite but they are not really going to do anything about what we said.'
- 'Did you notice how defensive they were?'
- 'I felt they were coming from different places.'
- 'That was a waste of time, they were not really listening.'

The team role-playing themselves would catch some of what Argyris and Schon (1978) call their 'defensive routines' with comments like:

- 'Well they would say things like that?'
- 'They clearly talked to a disgruntled client, I am sure that the others are not like that.'
- 'We should note the name of that staff member. They are clearly a trouble maker.'

Through this process the team would be able to collect the key messages from the feedback and the key dynamics they noticed in the interaction. Doing this for all the different stakeholders provides the team with a rich field of data which allows them to explore what they need to do differently.

A: Action

Moving on to the fourth phase of the CLEAR model, there are various ways of moving to action – a vital stage in the process. Having explored the ways in which the team has been responded to, and the impact of previous events on different aspects of team functioning and opened up new possibilities, the team coach then has to help the team move from awareness into action. How are the team going to act differently and perform better going forward?

Team development events can produce a lot of insight and energy, but unless this is focused on specific and prioritised new actions and behaviours, the new energy will soon dissipate. So the challenge for the coach is to deal with the material generated, in a way that moves the group to committed actions quickly and surely. One way of effectively doing this is to use the three-way sort exercise.

Three-way sort (a good way of responding to material in Quadrant B, C or D)

Initially we set up three flip charts, each one with a different title:

- 'What we need to hold onto and build on…'
- 'What we need to stop doing…'
- 'What we need to start doing…'

We divide the team into three sub-teams and ask each sub-team to start at a different large sheet of paper or white board. The first phase of this process is for each sub-team to brainstorm responses to the question in front of them. We then get them to put down their ideas, leaving some space between each idea they put down. After five minutes each team moves to the next board to their right. The second phase of the process is to build on the ideas left by the previous team and make these ideas more specific. At the second session, the rule is that nobody can cross anything out, but everybody is encouraged to make more specific what is already there and add additional items. If, for example, the previous group has put 'communication', the second group would be asked to add their responses to the question 'communication between whom and about what?'

The third phase of the process involves the group moving onto their last board. Here once again, the team members can add items that have not so far been included, but they need also to make more specific the items that are already there.

Finally each group moves back to their original board, and having read what is there, prioritise the issues. Alternatively, every team member can be given five stars and asked to allocate them, anywhere on any of the three boards, next to the priority issues that need action. They can allocate the five stars against issues in any way they want. This visual voting method quickly shows up how the team sees its priorities and directions for moving forward.

R: Review

Finally, in order to complete the adult learning cycle, the team members need to review what they have learned, and what they will do differently in the future. Having contracted, listened, diagnosed, explored and planned action, the team focuses upon building a review process. As in all learning and change cycles, the team should be prepared for the fact that they will discover more about their team culture and the systemic dynamics, when they try to change things. They need to pre-empt the unavoidable disappointment that will arise when they discover the actions they plan at a team workshop will not work out the way they expected, once they are back in the ever-changing world of their work system.

Some teams positively build this process of tracking the progress into their regular meetings in a number of different ways:

- ensuring the mission statement is pinned up in the meeting room, and checking how the meeting decisions and meeting process align with the mission they agreed;
- having quick updates against the scorecard when they have a meeting;
- taking a key priority action area for review at each team session;
- reviewing the meeting in the light of their planned team improvements, and each person sharing

    a) what they think has been good about the meeting and

    b) what they think could be even better next time.
- having the team coach attend their regular internal meetings of key events, and provide live coaching.

Conclusion

For teams to be wise rather than foolish, and function at a level that is more than the sum of their parts, does not happen automatically. It needs working at on a regular basis. In sport there is a general recognition that a team of individual stars, thrown together, do not between them make a great team. High quality team coaching, and time on the training ground, is essential for improving the team's success. Increasingly the same process is being recognised in the world of organizations. Only very recently the business world has understood that really good team coaches are not just people who were once experienced players, but are people who have undertaken specific training in team coaching and facilitation. They need to constantly upgrade their skills and receive regular supervision on their team coaching.

Supervision on team coaching is particularly useful at the following points in the process:

- contracting;
- diagnosis and intervention design;
- reviewing a team workshop and planning how to sustain the momentum;
- regularly reviewing how the relationship is progressing.

At all these times all seven modes of supervision are relevant and nearly always necessary to ensure good quality reflection (see Chapter 9).

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