

TEAM COACHING

Team coaching for performance. Tools, frame of reference, and change of perspectives;

The first four toolbox articles on this website have offered a number of foundational principles on coaching. They provide precise indications as to what basic posture coaches could embody and what fundamental strategies they could implement when facing individuals and teams. Indeed, principles for team coaching first rest on the same coaching principles that apply to coaching individuals. Adding the term "team" to coaching does not suddenly obliterate the fact that team coaching first rests on a coaching attitude and posture, applied to accompanying teams.

Team coaching processes target intact teams. Intact teams includes a team manager or leader and all participating team employees or direct reports. Although traditional teams are relatively easy to delineate, some modern teams may be network teams or teams belonging to matrix systems where multiple participation and leaderships may result in a difficulty to define some teams with precision. Team coaching can apply to all these different contexts.

To further evoke organizational coaching principles and strategies, it is also useful to underline that team coaching can require a large number of tools, techniques, tactics that apply to that larger context. If team coaching postures and skills are similar to individual coaching, albeit at a different level of complexity, the same can be said of organizational coaching compared to working with teams. In effect, organizational coaching is kin to team coaching, with several layers of added complexity.

Consequently, without proceeding with reflections on organizational coaching, this article provides an inventory of practical principles, strategies, tools and methods appropriate to team coaching. These have been developed and experimented over decades and are foundational to understanding and implementing systemic organizational coaching.

This presentation will not repeat methods, techniques, strategies and tools used in one-on-one coaching contexts. It is assumed here that the reader is already versed in the action, future and achievement-oriented premises and skills displayed by a professional individual coach. One way to revisit how individual coaching posture and strategies are used when team coaching is to revisit other more classical team development approaches that are *not* to be considered team coaching.

What is not team coaching ?

Team building is not team coaching. In different shapes and forms, team building has been on the market for at least sixty years. True team coaching has been slowly and very informally developed as a specific approach since 2000. To give an indication to support this affirmation, the International Coach Federation is the largest professional association for coaches in the world, and it was founded in 1995. The coaching profession as a specific approach using a precise frame of reference and resting on a number of determined skills is not much older.

- Most team building processes are tailored to develop individual and collective motivation in teams. Team coaching rests on the firm foundational belief that clients do not to be motivated. They *are* fundamentally motivated.
- Team building processes usually rest on applying a number of externally designed extraordinary experiences to a team while coaching rests on the premise that the client and coach co-design the coaching process.
- Team building experiences are used as metaphors, but have nothing to do with a specific team's everyday concerns, coaching a team is focused on coaching each team's specific operational activity.
- Team building *processes* are generally led by experts in different fields, often creating a strong team transference in the relationship with that expert, while team coaching focuses on processes that are led by the team members themselves and that are tailored to avoid creating dependency with the coach.
- Team building processes are generally organized off property to get the team away from everyday concerns while team coaching is generally undertaken on location, oftentimes in the team's usual meeting space, in order to attempt to bring change right into the everyday work environment.

This is just a short list, but the obvious conclusion is that the frames of reference for each of the two processes rest on totally different foundations. Mind that the object of this differentiation is not to judge that team building work focused on developing team motivation is not useful and sometimes necessary. The object here is just to underline that team building and team coaching are fundamentally different approaches in their philosophy and nature.

Moderating team meetings as an external "facilitation" expert is not the equivalent of team coaching. Indeed, coming into a team meeting to help it

achieve operational results by leading the meeting to success consists in replacing a process shortcoming in a specific team competency, with the competency of an external moderation expert. Team coaching in American football does not consist in having the coach replace a key team role such as the quarterback, not anymore than having the coach replace the goal position in European soccer.

Granted, replacing team shortcomings with external process expertise is not exactly the same as coming in as an expert *on the content* of the team's work and providing the team with solutions to its operational problems. This is what an external marketing expert would offer a team who displayed a need to develop marketing savvy. Moderating team meetings to compensate for poor team meeting facilitation skills is, however, creating a different form of process dependency. Consequently, creating team dependency on process skills provided by external experts is not the equivalent of coaching teams to help them run their own meetings more effectively.

To be sure, it is sometimes very useful for a team to call on an external process expert and have that person ensure that the team be effective in solving its own urgent operational problems. The object here is just to underline that team coaching is a totally different approach from team facilitation. Team coaching rests on a different frame of reference.

Team coaching is not training teams on how to develop better relationships. Some would have it that if a team does not achieve good results, the reason lies mainly in the poor quality of relationships in that team. Trust is low, communication channels are faltering, jealousies are rampant, rumors and gossip are paramount, interpersonal coordination is low, anger and different forms of emotional violence and manipulations are common, etc. This frame of reference positions good relationships in teams as a prerequisite for excellent operational results.

The observable fact in sports environments is: winning teams never have relational problems. One could conclude that in order to have good relationships in a system, the prerequisite is to help it focus on achieving extraordinary results. When results are above expectations in a team, pride and motivation follow. Indeed, it is commonly observed that very performing collective results develop a very level of team trust, respect, commitment, initiative, empowerment, high quality and consequently, more results.

Focusing on improving poor relationships in a team often sends the message that having and preserving good relationships is more important than having high professional expectations from team peers. Too much concern for good relationships often leads to catering to face-saving strategies and collective complacency. This is not to say that working on the positive quality of relationships in a team is not sometimes useful if not necessary. The object of the above development is very simply to position team coaching as a different and complementary approach to other relationship-oriented team-development strategies.

Delivering training on specific tools and methodologies in a team context is not the equivalent of coaching teams. To be sure, it is sometimes useful to quickly deliver specific tools for a team to rapidly gain in effectiveness. Most teams, for example, could rapidly gain in learning how to implement an efficient decision-making or a more performing team-meeting process in the course of a one or two-day team-training session. Following a rapid practical training session as a team, the system would know how to implement a new and more effective process to succeed in running its daily activities.

Suffice it to say that coaching and team coaching is not delivering ready-made tools. It is a totally different approach by which teams discover their needs and design their own new specific processes while working to achieve better operational and measurable results. The way this is accompanied by a team coach is the object of the text below.

Having made this short inventory on what team coaching is not, let us consider what the characteristics of what coaching a team is or could be, as a very complementary approach in the above team-development environment.

Teams coaching is system coaching

To individual coaching, team coaching adds the complexity factor that is best defined by Systems Analysis theory. In coaching teams, the system or the team is perceived and addressed as one unitary client system. Consequently, beyond coaching each team member during a series of one-on-one relationships within a team environment, a team coach is most performing when coaching the team itself as a single entity or body.

- **Example:** The function of a basketball team coach is to focus on developing the whole team's performance as a system. Note that each individual player in that team could also call on a different personal coach to develop as an individual.

Whether or not a team coach takes into account the systemic effect in a client team, the team as system will have an effect on the coach's work. This fact makes team coaching necessarily a different art from the art of individual coaching.

To take an example from the world of music, coaching a soloist will lead to developing an excellent soloist, but never an excellent team musician, inherently capable of participating in an orchestra. Likewise in sports, a successful team wins when team members have a high competency to interface, or to pass each other the ball. This is different from having each individual has a high capacity as a solitary achiever.

Consequently, team coaching is very different from individual coaching whether it is done one-on-one or in a collective context. This may underline the need for a number of very different competencies on the coach's part:

- It may be useful to understand different personality profiles to be a good individual coach, but that knowledge may get in the way when coaching teams. Understanding team cultural profiles is much more useful when coaching collective systems.
- Focusing on individual behavior and indicators is useful in individual coaching, just as pinpointing and understanding collective strategies and interface patterns is very useful for a team coach.

- An individual coach may rely on some external tools such as profile inventories and 360° evaluations, while team coaches may rely on team profile questionnaires team culture diagnostic tools.
- Individual coaches focus on developing more performing internal processes within people, team coaches focus on team internal processes, or what happens between people.
- Individual coaches need to help individuals develop their external network for success with other individuals, while team coaches will also focus on system to system network development.
- Etc.

We have stated some generalities to position the art of team coaching as focused on a very different level of reality than that of individual coaching. This underlines that *team coaching is not individual coaching of all a team's members*, even if this is done in a collective setting. To consider team coaching, consider the specifics illustrated below.

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Coaching team-meetings

Team meeting coaching is the one most widespread and practical setting for conducting a team coaching process. Team meeting coaching consists in coaching a client team while it is in the process of running one of its regular team meetings.

Team meeting coaching is a process by which a team coach will be present and coach a team during the whole duration of a specified number of team meetings. During these meetings the coach will input in a given number of coaching ways to help the team progress towards its defined meeting objectives and desired outcomes.

The rationale for implementing team meeting supervision is systemic: teams physically exist or explicitly display their specific processes at times when all team members are present and active together, focused on their collective goals. In most teams, that happens specifically and sometimes only during team meetings. The team meetings are therefore the best and sometimes the only time to undertake efficient work for coaching teams.

- **Example:** A typical team coaching contract can provide for six full-day coaching sessions over a yearlong period, every other monthly team meeting. After coaching two or three team meetings, a one or two-day team coaching session (see below) can be proposed to undertake, for instance, a team culture diagnosis to pin-point specific team development needs.

The predefined rhythm for such a team coaching process, such as every other team meeting, or every third team meeting can be adapted to correspond to specific contract need. Coaching a team through a crisis situation may require a coach to be present at every team meeting while coaching a team on longer term strategic issues could require a coach's presence no more than every few months, if not just a couple of times per year.

Team Coaching Seminars

Dedicated team coaching seminar or workshop are the most obvious approach and sometimes the least effective way to initiate a process for team coaching. It consists in organizing a two or three-day workshop type of seminar during which the team will allegedly be coached. A team coach needs to be particularly cautious when using this approach, knowing there are two significant pitfalls in terms of frame of reference.

- **Caution:** The team and team leader may expect a traditional seminar type of content and process, both to be managed and delivered by the alleged coach. This process may not so much be the equivalent as when team coaching as it may inherit too many aspects of traditional training or team building.

Efficient sessions to coach teams takes place when the session process and content is totally owned, organized and managed by the team itself. Ideally, the team coach should not be more central or involved in the process or in the content than any one other team member.

By definition when team coaching, a session content should primarily be business-oriented, focused on team projects or team issues. Team coaching is only very partially focused on knowledge acquisition, theory and "extra-curricular" or other metaphorical learning activities. Should training or other activities take place, these should not be organized or managed by the team coach.

- **Example:** A team of managers once contracted coaches to accompany them in a team-building process organized with other consultants specialized in running outdoor activities. The outdoor exercises were led and debriefed by the outdoor consultants. A team coaching process then followed, in the peripheral presence of the outdoor consultants. The time frame was adapted to the situation, as two-hour outdoor activities were followed by a minimum of six to eight hours of team-managed work focused on achieving organizational results. This indoor work was accompanied by the team coach.

In this particular situation the team and coaches used the outdoor activities as business-oriented springboards for subsequent team coaching centered on the team's specific business issues. The outdoor activities were not considered coaching sequences. They just were complementary to the coaching sequences, and served to provoke major changes of perspective for the team.

- **Caution:** Typically, once a workshop or training session is over, the team may consider the learning process as completed. Team coaching becomes more efficient when it follows a continuous process, followed-up in time, integrated in the team's real business activity, within predefined regular sessions.

We suggest that when team coaching, a seminar is much more efficient if it is included as a specific sequence in a larger regular team meeting coaching process. Consequently and as a rule, we will not start a team coaching process with workshops or seminars. This is to avoid the frame of reference short cut by which a client team or coach will perceive that coaching teams is a new fancy term for more common team building sessions.

When team coaching, formally organized seminars or workshops can be inserted in the course of a longer-term team coaching process to achieve a team-specific time-consuming goal, such as:

- To undertake a complete diagnosis of the team's culture, using a specific diagnostic tool or undertake a yearly team "checkup", or a team 360° inventory,
- To teach the team on a specific process such as its decision making and follow-up process including tracking and publicly posting results.
- To help specify the team's vision and long-term mission.
- To introduce the team to a needed collective skill, such as designing and implementing a number of delegated processes.
- To define ambitious measurable operational team goals for the coming year.
- Etc.

Homework

Not all work coaching teams takes place in the presence of the team coach. It is also the team coach's role to help a team grow and develop in the coach's absence. To achieve this, changes in team processes can be co-designed with the coach, to be later implemented by the team in the coach's absence. The effects of these changes can be measured and reported by the team during an ulterior team-coaching event.

- **Example:** A management team that met on a monthly basis displayed major difficulties in its management of urgencies while suffering the effects of a critical change in its market context. As a result, unofficial ad-hoc meetings between a few key members of the team were held to deal with the urgencies. Consequently, other team members were kept out of the decision-making loop and felt regularly uninformed.

In this situation and for the duration of their crisis situation, the team decided to temporarily plan for short weekly team meetings that would complement the official longer monthly meeting.

Adapting the team's meeting rhythm brought about the expected result of bringing everyone back into the decision making loop. This increased efficiency, re-motivated all the team members, and took some of the pressure off the leader and central members that were taking more than their share of the work load and stress. The result was reported to the coach two months later, at the next meeting dedicated to coaching the team.

- **Example:** Two team members were having difficulties in their work interface and regularly took time and energy away from common team concerns to solve their interpersonal issues during team meetings. They attempted to repeat that process in the coach's presence. The team asked the two to meet weekly on their own and when necessary with a designated third party to iron out their difficulties. They were asked to report their progress in every monthly team meeting for the following six months.

The strategy to delegate or externalize the interpersonal problem out of the team meeting was a clear message to the two protagonists to get their act together and quit using team meetings as a stage for playing out their relational problems.

Consequently, the more a team coach helps a team prescribe actions or homework between and out of coached meetings, the more the team will integrate the progress it makes during the coached meetings into their everyday activity.

To conclude each coached meeting, a team coach will not hesitate to ask the team and each team member key learning items they will implement or practice in their professional environment before the next coaching session and between team meetings. At the beginning of the next coached sessions, the team members should be asked to share or report their progress.

On a regular basis when coaching teams, it is a good idea for the team coach to ask the team to monitor and report its process-management progress and the effect it has on team or individual operational results. Over a six-month coaching process, it is suggested at least a midway progress evaluation that clearly takes into account team actions that are implemented outside of the supervised coached meetings.

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Team coaching tools

We can now list and explain a number of tools that can easily be implemented when coaching teams and organizations. Obviously, some are behavioral tools that will need to be practiced time and again by the team coaches until they can be naturally and effectively implemented.

Triangulation

Basically, triangulating consists in drawing a third party into a face-to-face situation. It is a communication tool anyone can model when coaching teams, during team meetings or in larger groups or networks. It is both part of team coaching practice, and can be explained to the team as a method to develop meeting flow. Triangulation also will create or stimulate "circularity" or fluidity when coaching teams or large group interactions.

Examples: When a team work process gets stuck in any way, such as:

- When one team member is delivering a (too) lengthy presentation or someone is intensely arguing to sell a personal point of view.
- When two or more team members are battling to convince the rest of the team to choose between one of their “strong” positions.
- When you observe that other team members have become passive observers.

Circularity or energy flow focused on achieving results has disappeared and a “polarity” between competing people as been installed in its place. In effect, one, two or more people are on stage, and the rest of the team is pushed back into an observer role.

Polarities are repetitious communication patterns that exclude some of the team members by giving others a dominant position on content or process. They are considered a less productive type of team interaction and generally reveal a team’s cultural habits and limits.

In team coaching, triangulating consists in gradually involving third and fourth parties by pulling them into the interaction, until all team members become equally active and on stage. An aware and nimble team coach can efficiently redirect polarities and help recreate circularity with a few simple modeling behaviors.

- **Example:** “Indirect eye contact” consists in looking at other team members when one of them is talking, presenting or developing an idea.

Whenever an articulate team member succeeds in “locking” the coach’s (or leader’s) eyes, he or she will feel reinforced and continue developing the same subject extensively, sometimes hogging the floor, thereby creating a polarity while everyone else listens. A team coach’s circulatory eye contact with other team members will both suggest the speaker address the rest of the group and elicit diagonal interventions from other team members.

- **Example:** As a team coach, or team member, directly elicit a specific and unexpected team member’s input on a subject, and then pull back and look at other participants to provoke their reactions in turn. This will help redirect and stimulate the discussion flow when coaching teams: “what do you think Joe (and then look at Jack and Jill while Joe answers).

Note that when the team coach or the team leader becomes the main auditor or “target” of a presentation, other team members are relegated to secondary observer roles, and will often gradually ease into different forms of passivity: fidget or doodle, loose interest, offer a joke, start side discussions, read unrelated documents, read e-mail or text messages, leave the room, etc.

- **Example:** Give a completely different and creative point of view on a subject forcefully driven by one person, and then pull out of the discussion by looking at your notes or other team members to leave space for others to offer their participation.

Some team “polarity” is characterized by standardized thinking patterns and single-solution or politically correct approaches to problem solving. When coaching teams, these can be redirected by a team coach modeling “out of the box” proposals, solutions, or thinking patterns.

- **Caution:** The danger in that strategy will obviously become reality if the team coach gets emotionally involved in defending a personal original idea in an opinionated way, thereby creating a new polarity within the team, this time focused on the coach’s position.

When coaching teams, these polarity “redirecting” or triangulating strategies are most efficient if they are implemented sparingly and fed into the team in a short and efficient way, and quickly abandoned. The team coach should try to rapidly regain a peripheral position. It is strongly advised that the team coach stay strategically out of, or on the border of team discussions, keeping a personal noncommittal distance with operational content, and staying on the fringe of the team’s interactive processes.

The aim in modeling triangulation or energy redirection when coaching teams is of course to gradually teach the team to manage its own energy direction and circularity. Ideally, the less a team coach or team leader has to accompany the team, the more all the team members gain in empowerment, freedom and creativity, and the more the team can become really successful.

Geography Management

The above advice for a team coach to always keep and return to a peripheral position in team interactions allows the coach to perceive a good overview of the team configuration. A system view of the team as a form of mobile hanging from the ceiling or as a sort of human constellation can offer a number of systemic indications concerning preferred relationships, antagonisms, coalitions, clans and clusters.

The geographic positioning of team members in a team meeting is never to be considered a “chance” happening. As a matter of fact, the geographical position of team members in a meeting context offers a number of indicators as to the real team network. More often than not, geography reveals the team’s real interactive network. This is to be taken into account when coaching teams.

- **Example:** Once a team coach made a comment on the seating order in a team meeting, proposing some conclusions as to what that order could mean. One of the team members responded that her position in the room didn’t reveal much because she had just taken the last seat that was left when she arrived. It turned out that she was also the most recent recruit in the team.
- **Caution:** When coaching teams and observing geography, never jump to hasty conclusions. The same geographical layout can reveal a number of different underlying team dynamics. And once in awhile a cigar is just a cigar. When coaching teams, the most interesting interpretation and discussion on the meaning of a team’s geographical layout will always be the one the team volunteers.

Who sits close to whom and opposite whom? Who regularly gravitates next to the team leader, who sits at the front, and who towards the back, who moves about a lot, or evolves around the fringes, who stays out of the circle, Who are glued at the hips? or who hogs the center of the stage? These questions and corresponding observations of team layout both during work sessions and during breaks can give excellent indicators as to the systemic

equilibrium and network dynamics within a team.

- **Example:** No matter the observed network, coaching team mobility in keeping with the “circularity” principle is a good strategy. For one thing, the team coach can regularly reposition or move around within the team geography.

Never sit in the same place or by the same people twice in a row. Take every opportunity to exchange seats with team members who happen to leave their position. Displacing one's own chair to have a different view of the room is another way to change the room equilibrium and model mobility and circularity. Another strategy is to openly suggest other team members change seats, or to have the team leader move closer to the center or to the sidelines. Indeed, simply displacing the leader often changes everyone's perspective on the political layout of the team.

- **Example:** During team meetings, the best team coach position is often on the outskirts of the team or within the team as a participant. Except for rare specific occasions such as a short sequence modeling a meeting role, being central by facilitating the meeting or by leading any other team activity is not a valid coaching stance.

When, for example, a coach regularly moderates or facilitates a team meeting, this reinforces the team's dependence on the coach and by transference, on the leader, rather than developing the team's capacity to moderate itself. The same goes for time management, focus on goals and follow up of results, decision-making, resource management and individual coaching.

Consequently, when coaching teams and as far as team process-management goes, the best approach for a team coach is to be hands-off. The best geographical position to illustrate this team coaching position is to be off-center or on the team periphery. When coaching teams, it may also be useful to suggest that different people change their seating position within the team geography. This may serve to reveal and disrupt an obvious coalition between two team members, to separate a dependent team member from too close a position to the team leader, to pull forward a reserved team member from the back of the room.

Example: When coaching teams, it may sometimes be useful to clarify a personal choice of position within the group geography: “If I sit within the circle, I will be interacting as a participant and expect to be managed by the facilitator, but when I pull back out of the circle, it is because I am choosing to observe your processes, and would rather you didn't solicit my participation.”

Modeling strategic positioning and commenting on how the coach uses room geography in the coaching process may help the team become aware of how the relative positions of members affects team interaction.

- **Example:** A team coach can suggest that the team meetings be organized in different locations from one time to another. Each new location can be an opportune time to provoke different and more mobile team geography. Change of geography and location helps to provoke changes in interactive modes. That, in turn, develops team creativity and reactivity.

Again when coaching teams, the circularity principle applied to team geography is an easy way for a team coach to help unravel longstanding relational habits and communication routines. In that way, a team coach can provoke new and different interfacing channels that can create different team thinking patterns and often help provide new insights and solutions.

[To consult a more detailed article on circularity in meetings](#)

Equal Time Principle

In order to offer unbiased information during democratic elections, public medias in democracies have the obligation to provide equal time coverage to all the candidates. We suggest that team coaches adopt the same stance, and attentively observe preferred coverage demonstrated by different team members.

Note that a number of team coaches will not accept to coach both a team and one of the members of that team, be it the team's leader. Should a need for individual coach appear or be expressed, these team coaches will refer the individual client to another coach.

- **Caution:** When coaching teams,, one can easily become that team leader's coach or the individual coach of some of the other team members. From there on, one of the coaching relationships is bound to suffer and the coach may gradually get too involved and lose a healthy strategic “distance”.

The best “mobile” position for a coach is to be equidistant from all of the team members. There is nothing against a team coach being close to client team members, if that team coach is equally close or just as distant with all of the team members. When coaching teams, the difficulty will rapidly increase if the team coach is perceived as partial, more interested or less involved with some of the members. This, of course, does not mean the team coach needs to stay aloof from everyone. Just equidistant.

- **Caution:** Preferential relationships work right into the “family metaphor” of parents favoring preferred siblings, creating dysfunctional jealousies and resentment between children.

For a start, it can be interesting strategy for a team coach to consciously find ways to create different but equal and authentic relational coalitions with

each of the team member, be it during breaks. These coalitions can concern very different personal subjects of interest, for example and can be publicly displayed, equally.

- **Caution:** When coaching teams, a perceived preferential coalition between the team coach and the team leader will generally make the team feel that the work is tailored to be at the leader's advantage rather than focused on unbiased team development. This occurrence could sometimes be at a cost.

Face to face coaching work on a team leader's difficulties can be very useful when done in the presence of the team. This individual work could include the team coach working with the leader and with the team co-responsibility in implementing solutions. It is useful to specifically coach the team on what it can do differently to ease the leader's difficulties or to facilitate the leader's progress. This type of work can be prepared with the leader, and powerfully models continuous development as a work ethic. The team coach's equidistance with all the team members is a vital position for that type of work.

When coaching teams, applying the equal time and equidistance principle as a strategy is also a model for the team members and team leader to reproduce. They too can learn how to equally develop all team interfaces within their team's interactive network without privileging personal preferences. This team coaching strategy promotes collective growth rather than the development of some of the team members at the expense of others.

Process Delegation

The transference patterns mentioned above suggests that teams often expect their coaches to manage their processes and deliver content in the same way as they expect to be led by their leaders, trainers and consultants. In a way, teams tend to delegate process and content management "upwards" to the coach in much the same way as they do to their leaders and other external support providers.

In as much as meeting processes reveal team processes in general, one can assume that if a team delegates meeting process and content responsibility upwards to the team leader, they do the same with most other team process and content responsibilities. Passive teams are passive during meetings. Active teams also demonstrate their process ownership during team meetings.

When coaching teams, during their team meeting context can help implement new and more effective behavioral interactions which will be reproduced within the teams following the team coaching events. If team behavior and interfacing evolves within team meetings, this evolution influences all aspects of the team's existence, including its relationship to its environment.

Part of team coaching may therefore consist in gradually helping the team members collectively own the process and content management within their meetings as a first step to doing the same with all the rest of their professional activity. Within meetings, the strategy is to empower teams to manage their own processes rather than have them be assumed by the coach or the leader.

To be able to implement team coaching, a coach needs to be free of other tasks and concerns. When coaching teams, the teams are to own and manage their own time, their own meeting moderation or facilitation, their own objectives and results, their own decisions and follow-up, their own resources and even their own individual coaching. When a team learns to own these processes, it can then be coached on how to do it even better on the long term.

After observing how a team manages its own processes over one or two meetings, a team coach can sometimes model a specific role that will permit better effectiveness, and then delegate that role to the team.

- **Example:** In a meeting supervision context, a team coach first helped a team manage their time by announcing on a regular basis the time elapsed and the time left in each meeting sequence. This role is what is sometimes called the pacer. The suggested pacing rhythm is every five minutes for twenty to thirty minute meeting sequences.

During that meeting, the pacing information permitted the team members to keep better track of their time and stay focused on their goals. At the end of the meeting, the team coach asked for feedback on the usefulness of the pacing role, and then asked the team members how they plan to assume the responsibility for pacing themselves more efficiently in their future meetings.

This simple way of introducing process roles can be implemented by a team coach to progressively input a number of useful meeting roles into any team. Once a given role is managed by one of the team members, the team coach can question the way it is being done and help the team proceed with gradual improvement.

- **Caution:** When a role is assigned to one same team member on a permanent basis, we have observed that the team will not get the full benefit of the function covered by the role.

When coaching teams, if one person is designated, for instance to pace all a team's meetings, the team may not heed the pacer and then scapegoat the person for the team's poor time management.

Consequently, it is useful to observe how meeting roles are attributed by the team, to whom these roles are attributed, and why. This may give the team coach an indication of how the team owns other processes, how they assign responsibilities to some team members so as to avoid collective responsibilities, or how some team members are designated to carry the weight of the team's inefficiencies. A team will not really "own" its time management, for instance, if the team members just assign the role to someone, and then forget to support that person when he or she is doing the job.

To avoid falling into that trap, meeting roles need to rotate among team members from one meeting to the next. This rotation of roles will help each team member and the system as a whole develop collective responsibility for achieving meeting results.

Beyond the decision-maker role usually held by the team decision maker or leader, some of the key meeting roles a team coach can model in supervised meetings are the following:

- The moderator or facilitator helps the team manages energy circularity during the meeting. The moderator is more focused on the interfacing processes between team members while other focus on the content of the meeting.
- The pacer illustrated in the example above is focused on efficiently managing team rhythm within twenty-minute time segments.
- The decision driver, focuses on managing team decisions. That role consists in continuously keeping the team focused on making decisions, and then on recording these decisions faithfully and completely on a decision sheet, for follow-up purposes.
- The “meeting coach”, not to be confused with the team coach, delivers individual development or solution-centered behavior options for future meetings, to each of the team members, at the end of the meeting.

The team members that assume the responsibility of each role obviously also need to input whatever content-related comments they should volunteer as professional participants. The first time they play a role, these process-managers may feel a difficulty in both managing process and professionally participating in delivering content. This difficulty gradually disappears as the learning advances.

These roles are implemented during meetings by each of the team members in turn. They are in fact different managerial functions. As these roles rotate among team members, each gradually learns to implement the functions represented by the roles during team meetings.

- **Caution:** Coached teams invariably suggest that their team coach assume the responsibility of the “meeting coach”, and give everyone a feedback at the end of one of their meeting sequences.

Make sure that the progress-centered meeting coach role is also delegated to each of the team members in turn. Just as for the other roles, and after having modeled it once, it is important that a team coach not assume that role on a recurring basis. The team coach would thereby keep the team members from an opportunity to internally develop the skills and responsibilities the role permits.

Having to give each team member individual progress-centered options may also divert the coach’s focus away from “team coaching” and more towards individual coaching in a collective context.

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[To consult a more detailed article on these delegated roles in meetings](#)

Team Subdivision

In the course of a long-term supervision process of team meetings, it is sometimes useful that the team break up into two or more distinct sub-groups simultaneously working on different issues.

- **Example:** In the course of a daylong meeting supervision, a team coach proposed the group split into two sub-committees to work on two “hot” issues that each concerned the whole team. Each sub-group was to work for two hours and come back with a written list of suggested options to solve a series of operational problems on the one hand, and to deal with important discipline issues on the other. It was understood that each sub group would be working towards listing possible decisions that would affect the whole team. The team leader and the coach stayed out of both groups.

After the two hours work session, when the team reconvened in a larger group, the written decision lists were distributed to the larger team, and the team leader committed to validate the decisions within a week.

This type of team subdivision process reveals a few underlying principles of some team meetings. For example, team members often attend team meetings to make sure:

- That nothing escapes their control and
- That no significantly or bold decisions will be made.

Subdividing the work between two sub-groups puts all the team members in a situation where some of the discussions and decisions will escape their control, and in a position to have to trust their fellow team members to consider the total team picture to formulate valid decisions.

- **Caution:** Teams often suggest that each sub-group be a cross-section of the team with individual members representing all the areas of responsibility. This approach may in effect have everyone keep indirect control of whatever may happen in the other meeting.

It is much more efficient to have each sub group membership composed of “experts” that are more concerned with the issues and very different from the profile of the members of the other group, to create clear differences in approach and results.

- **Caution:** From meeting to meeting the team coach should take care to have the team remix sub group membership configurations. Keeping the same configuration of sub-committees would in effect create two sub-teams, each with own their power structure and standardized thinking and interfacing patterns. The circularity principle is also useful when constituting sub groups and short-term project teams.

Team subdivision as a team coaching option disrupts routine meeting interfacing patterns. The disruption creates opportunities for learning, change, and creation of new more productive interfacing patterns.

In as much as the team leader often avoids participating in any sub group, this team coaching option also puts the leader in a de-facto delegating context. The sub teams must be trusted to do a good job in the leader's absence, albeit in a well framed setting with very precise objectives. Note that the leader is still the final decision maker, having to validate the decision proposals before these are to be implemented by the whole team.

This team-coaching format also offers the team coach some one-on-one time with the team leader to evaluate progress and plan for future steps. Needless to say, it is recommended that the team coach and leader openly share their one-on-one process and communicate any decision with the rest of the team following their private coaching time.

Commitment indicators

One of the focuses of team coaching concerns the degree of commitment team members have and display towards their team as a system and consequently towards its results.

As a team coach, a shortlist of “commitment indicators” can help to clarify perceptions of team members’ commitment. This, shortlist can sometimes be usefully shared with teams to help them clarify and develop member commitment. These indicators fall into three main team management fields: team time management, team energy management, and team ethics management.

- Time management indicators: Punctuality, Presence, Confidentiality
- Energy management indicators: Reactivity and Pro-activity, Confrontation, Assiduity
- Ethics management indicators: Acting out. Consumption of mind-altering products

Team Tracking and Posting

“Tracking and posting” is a team operational follow-up process that can help reveal business processes that need team coaching as well as team support. Tracking and posting helps develop transversal co-responsibility within teams. To be efficient, team tracking and posting should remain focused on very simple success measures and be light enough to be initiated by a few team members within a week or fifteen days.

Implementing a tracking and posting procedure in a team coaching process is relatively simple. The team coach can simply give the team members the list of criteria provided on the below and ask the team to define the results they want to achieve. The next step is to have the team, or parts thereof such as sub-teams work on designing the best tracking and posting device that will motivate them to continuously stay focused on achieving those

TEAM TRACKING AND POSTING PRINCIPLES:

The team tracking and posting concept is deceptively simple and extremely efficient when it respects all the following basic criteria:

- Each poster is focused on tracking the progress of a specific action by drawing attention to one significant success measure that concerns all the team members. If a team wishes to track two indicators, it should design two different tracking posters. Three is a crowd.
- Posted tracking concerns very basic and strategic team business result measures. Think in terms of client or financial results. For instance, don't track meeting punctuality, which is just an indirect means to increase team effectiveness that will help develop long-term competency.
- For example, one poster tracks individual and total sales volume, another individual and total sales profit ratio. Or one poster tracks individual and total savings. Or one poster tracks individual and total delivery deadline respect. Any one of these options is enough.
- The title of the tracking poster is simple and self-explanatory.
- The tracking poster is designed as a visible and attractive communication tool, not as an accountant's Excel spread sheet.
- The tracking poster is publicly displayed in a place where it can be seen by a maximum number of concerned team members and by the team environment. Get everyone interested in your progress. Posting can be displayed in the cafeteria.
- Team posted results show comparative results. It aims to recognize excellence and puts pressure on the team members who need to improve.
- Posted results are scrupulously followed up. Nothing reveals incompetence or ho-hum lack of constancy as much as a tracking poster that hasn't been filled for the three preceding months.
- Posted results show progression. They are displayed in a large enough space that can provide room for the results of each one of the year's fifty-two weeks.

For most teams, implementing a team coaching process is not an end in itself. The team is more often than not a management team and each of the team members is also a leader of another team. In the case of an executive team, the system is a collective leadership system, responsible for the effectiveness and results of a much larger and complex organization.

Just like any executive in the client team, the team coach is constantly focused on the larger organization represented by the team members. Coaching an executive team is the equivalent of working on the tip of an iceberg knowing well that every move will have a very real indirect effect on a huge mass of people and resources below the apparent surface.

Taking this into account, coaching an executive team as a system can potentially have a major effect on the whole organizational system. When coaching an executive team, one is in fact coaching a whole organization “through” it’s D.N.A. This indirect approach of organizational coaching can be carried out quite consciously and strategically.

- **Example:** After having learned and practiced the delegated meeting process within their executive team, and after seeing the positive process changes the new meetings permitted, some of the executive team members gradually introduced delegated meeting tools to their own divisional teams. After some months, these division teams were being run with the same meeting process. These division team members in turn decided to introduce the meeting process into their departmental teams. Within a year a large part of the organization management was implementing the delegated meeting process, actually introduced in a slowly spreading viral process.

The same observation goes for a host of subtle “circularity-developing” tools. In client organizations that have undertaken team coaching within several teams on several levels and in several locations, the natural or viral spreading of the tools is more rapid.

To be able to coach larger organizations effectively, it is useful for a team coach to develop a network of peers that uses the same general team coaching approach and family of tools and that can process an organization with a collective coherent team coaching approach.

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This overview of basic team coaching strategies and tools is coming to a close. As a concluding comment we would like to remind the team coach that the effectiveness of most of the above tools primarily rest on a team coach’s personal capacity to implement strategic coaching behavior. All in all, the first team-coaching tool is the coach’s capacity to interact within a team adequately and strategically. Any tool will become especially useful to a team if it is well introduced, at the right time.

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