

# THE RISE OF TEAMS AT WORK

Dr Declan Woods introduces the Association for Coaching's new team coaching competency model, making the case for a renewed focus on developing teams in the workplace.

The time for teams at work has arrived.

Conversely, teams in the workplace are not new and have existed in organisations for decades. Interest in them peaked in the 1980s with the promise of high-performing teams. Sadly, this potential wasn't met and many teams – then and now – underwhelm and underperform.

It is not surprising that teams seem to have got lost in the intervening period, with more individualistic cultures dominating. So why the resurgence of interest in teams now?

The shine has gone off the notion of individual heroic leaders, with organisations finally catching up to the fact that they are now just too complex to be led by any one person. Teams can meet this need by providing collective leadership drawn from a diverse membership.

Beyond this, teams have long been the chief means by which people at work are organised and tasks carried out, plus the mainstay through which performance is delivered. Put simply: when teams perform, so do organisations. While many teams don't perform as expected, they nonetheless possess huge potential, which firms are now looking to leverage for success.

## FACTORS DRIVING THE USE OF TEAMS

Traditional drivers around globalisation, technology and the like remain alongside newer ones: strategies needing to keep up with fast-paced market conditions; employees (particularly Gen Z) demanding more autonomy; the growth in knowledge work (over execution of work); and the need for knowledge to be pushed out from corporate centres to the furthest point at which work is carried out. These factors all hail the ascendancy of teams – and, with them, organisations looking for ways to support teams and improve their effectiveness.

There are many ways of doing just that: teambuilding, development, training, consultancy and facilitation to name the most common. Where

team coaching fits into this smorgasbord of offerings is the place of a future article, but suffice to say many of these interventions are not meeting the needs of teams fully, leaving a gap for team coaching to address.

## THE TEAM COACHING MARKET

The AC's interest in team coaching grew from two drivers: its members and the market. Many AC members were already working with teams and seeking formal recognition of their work in this area, or were looking to move out of the saturated individual coaching market.

While there is limited data available on the size of team coaching market, a 2018 valuation by Heidrick Consulting estimated it to be \$26,437,500, and anecdotal evidence points to it having grown since. Successive Ridler reports on the state of the coaching marketplace support this view, with the last report highlighting that 76% of organisations have increased their use of team coaching to support increasingly global, dispersed and fast-changing teams.<sup>1</sup>

Many teams have been formed or reorganised during or since Covid-19 lockdowns, and many have been grappling with hybrid working since. These factors suggest the growth in the use of team coaching by organisations looks set to continue.

## DEFINING TEAM COACHING

Returning to the second driver for the AC's concentration on team coaching, many of its organisational and corporate members were turning to the AC for guidance on how to support their teams and reported widespread confusion over what team coaching is (and isn't) and what good practice looks like.

Team coaching was a gap in the AC's line-up – until now. The AC has spent the last three and a half years exploring the field and its recent, and ongoing, work has sought to bring more clarity to a confusing

picture. This work included creating definitions of what constitutes a team and what team coaching is, in order to help educate members and the wider market.

The AC defines a team as 'collaboration between a recognised group of people drawing upon individual capabilities and strengths who are committed to working together inter-dependently to achieve a common purpose and collective performance and learning goals.'

This definition underlines the importance of people relying on each other while working together to achieve collective outputs. They (and others in the organisation) identify as being part of a particular group and harness individual contributions for the benefit of the whole team.

The AC defines team coaching as 'the application of coaching skills while working with a whole, intact team over time to improve inter-dependent members' abilities to work together collaboratively to achieve the team's collective purpose, potential and performance.'

This definition emphasises that coaching skills are at the heart of team coaching. While this should be self-evident, the use of such skills seemed to be lost in many team interventions. This description also shows the focus on the whole team. This does not ignore or downplay the role of the individual team member, rather it encourages practitioners to focus on the overall team. It reminds us that, like people, teams develop over time, and that one-off interventions (like awaydays or off-sites) are more often sticking-plaster solutions at best.

## TEAM COACHING COMPETENCIES

We wanted to understand how team coaches work with teams more fully and so extended our research. We carried out extensive desk and secondary research on teams and team coaching, followed by interviews with dozens of team practitioners globally. We codified the themes that emerged from the interviews before validating these qualitative findings and then arranging them into coaching competencies with practice indicators. The result was a team coaching competency model, which can be found on the AC website.<sup>2</sup>

A future article will expand on these competencies and explain how practitioners can use them to guide their work with teams. For now, we hope you find them educational and instructive.

## TEAM COACHING ACCREDITATION

A further outcome of the AC's studies into team coaching practice is an accreditation scheme in two parts: one for individual team practitioners, and the other for team coach training programmes. Details can be found on the AC's website.

Teams are complex, messy and constantly changing. The aspiration behind the accreditation scheme is to help providers create team coach training programmes that equip practitioners with the knowledge, skills and confidence to work with this messiness, and for these attributes to be recognised through individual practitioner accreditation.

We introduced this accreditation scheme to AC members and coach training providers in a series of webinars in May this year.

Feedback received so far is positive and encouraging:

- 'I am thoroughly impressed with the breadth and depth of the competency framework and the pragmatic and flexible approach to assessment.' *Coach training provider*
- 'I am impressed that the team coaching competencies are concise, inclusive and practical.' *AC member and team practitioner*
- 'A brilliant innovation.' *Organisational member*

I am confident we are on the right track. Work continues to develop detailed applicant guidance and forms, and we expect these to be ready

in the late summer. Applications will be open from 1 October. For more information, please contact the AC's accreditation team.

## THE FUTURE OF TEAM COACHING

Team coaching is in its relative infancy. It is where one-to-one coaching was twenty-something years ago: real understanding about it and when and how to deploy it is low; it is made available to the few rather than the many; it is used (often but not exclusively) to address dysfunction; and approaches and practices vary highly and are offered to differing quality standards and price points.

All markets follow a similar trajectory. Team coaching's is no different. As it matures, there will be more clarity about when to use it for best effect, it will be accessible by all teams and used to help them realise potential and to leverage strengths, and while techniques will remain diverse there will be more certainty about which to draw upon to achieve defined outcomes. In general, standards of practice will have improved.

By definition, team coaching entails working with a larger part of a system and has the potential to have a significant impact on it. Over time, team coaching will become a far more mainstream intervention in support of organisations' teams and, I predict, will become as large as or larger than the executive coaching market.

## TEAM COACHING IN COACHING PERSPECTIVES

### What does this all mean for Coaching Perspectives?

I am delighted to say that team coaching will become a regular fixture in this publication. We want to go further than addressing dilemmas encountered while coaching teams to covering teams more widely. From now on, we will be dedicating a section in each issue to the subject of team coaching.

We intend to present material on a range of team coaching topics, reflecting the wide diversity of thinking, approaches and practices. This is where we need your help – and contributions. Please send us your ideas and requests on areas you would like to see featured and, better still, offer to contribute articles yourself.

Join me as a fellow pioneer in this growing field.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr Declan Woods is the global head of team coaching standards and accreditation with the Association for Coaching, and CEO of teamGenie®, a company specialising in team design, coaching and development.

1. Reports of 2012, 2014 and 2016. See [ridlerandco.com](http://ridlerandco.com) for more information
2. [bit.ly/3arJdUJ](http://bit.ly/3arJdUJ)