



Team coaching and supervision

A MAP FOR COACHES AND SUPERVISORS
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When a coach transitions from one-to-one coaching to team coaching, there is clear evidence that they need significantly more knowledge, skills, confidence and self-awareness to equip them to work with the multiple layers and the greater degree of complexity that team coaching requires. The theoretical and practical knowledge, skills and capabilities, as well as the intervention methods and techniques that a team coach needs to develop and provide to their clients is considerable.

In this paper I would like to look at four key areas in the growing field of team coaching, and discuss the significant role that supervision plays to support team coaches in their development as practitioners in their work with their client teams. I invite the reader to consider the following issues:

- the context in which team coaches practise
- the demands facing the team coach
- the role of supervision for team coaches
- mapping the territory of team coaching – a method that enables the team coach with their supervisor to reflect on their practice (Hodge 2021)

The context

There is growing interest in many organisations to engage in the emerging practice of team coaching, particularly for senior or executive teams at board level. The reasons for these engagements include resolving conflicts within a team, enabling a team to identify and realise a common purpose, and using coaching to fulfil the team's collective potential. What each of these intentions seeks to achieve is specific to the team involved in its specific context, and this needs to be established clearly at the outset between the team members and the team coach, which is not always easy to define in the early stages of an assignment.

As you can see from the following definition, at the heart of the work is an intention to improve relationships within the team, develop their collective performance to meet a common goal, which in turn benefits the wider systems in which the teams are operating:

Team coaching 'focuses on helping the team collectively achieve the team's work in terms of both task and teamwork, through sustained professional dialogue that raises the individual and collective level of reflection and self-awareness, and challenges the team's thinking and behaviours as they develop their own sustainable solutions and practices.'
(EMCC 2023)

Team coaching is a relatively new practice (Jones, Napierski & Lyubovnikova 2019, Hodge & Clutterbuck 2019a). Until now there is little research-based evidence (e.g. Carr & Peters 2013, Graves 2021) to inform our understanding and appreciation of the complex range of skills and methods team coaches require that enable them to practise in this emerging field. There is a growing body of literature with specific focus on team coaching as a discrete discipline (e.g. Clutterbuck 2010; Hawkins 2014; Thornton 2019; Lawrence 2019 & 2020; Clutterbuck, D., Gannon, J., Hayes, S., Eds, 2019; Woudstra 2024; Widdowson & Barbour 2025).

What is clear is that while coaching the team forms the primary focus for this emerging practice, at times it may also include elements of team building, team development and team facilitation, depending on the team's stage of development. At the core of the current research and literature there appear to be three key streams that form the foundation of this work: systemic thinking, relational interactions and complex adaptive systems (Hodge 2021).

While there is no one seminal model of team coaching (Jones et al 2019) what is evident is that initial training in this field for many coaches is just the starting point. Many coaches are coming to the practice not only from a one-to-one coaching background, but are also drawing on and applying experience and knowledge from disciplines such as organisational development, adult learning and development, group facilitation, organisational psychology, process consulting, systems and constellations, family systems and group therapy. Coaches are thus needing to integrate many different elements from these diverse and yet interconnected disciplines, at the same time refining their own team coaching purpose and frameworks.

Recently several professional coaching bodies (e.g. ICF, EMCC, AC, APECS) have researched and developed competency and capability criteria for accrediting team coaching practitioners. These criteria provide a framework for coaches to calibrate their skills and identify their development needs.

It is increasingly acknowledged that this work sometimes places surprising demands on team coaches in their client situations. Based on recent research (Clutterbuck & Hodge 2017), team coaches recognise a need and appreciation for ongoing reflection on practice. In fact, perhaps different from one-to-one coaching, many team coaches are actively seeking support through the practice of supervision that I will discuss later in this paper. Before I explore the role of supervision, I would like to capture some of the demands that the team coach faces with their client teams.

The demands facing the team coach

Often the coach may be working alone with their client team, sometimes of up to 12 or more participants. We need to be asking questions such as:

- How do individual team coaches or teams of coaches hold the myriad of data, events and unpredictability in an assignment?
- How does the coach notice and attend to their own feelings that may perhaps include a sense of loss of control, of not knowing, of uncertainty that they are having an impact?
- When and how does the coach process and reflect on what is happening in an assignment and manage the impact it may be having on them, perhaps raising feelings of self-doubt, confusion or even impotence?
- Given the complexity of team coaching, with the constant changes in the system, the wider context, the team itself and the purpose of the work, how does the coach sit with or engage with what may be happening?

There is perhaps an irony here in the fact that for coaches with the necessary high levels of experience there is a tension and expectation that they **should know** what to do and how to do it, perhaps assuming a mantle of consultant or 'expert' identity, thus jeopardising their capacity to coach the team. At times they may be tempted to take too much control, or take too much responsibility, to make something happen.

It may be very difficult for the coach alone to make sense of their experience within a specific project – in the set up and contracting of a project, during its development and implementation, or afterwards. It's not only the practical aspects of what is happening and with whom in the client system, but also the impact of unpredictability, messiness, with all the psychological phenomena in the multiple relationships and in the wider system. Team coaches need to build in time to reflect for themselves about what is going on at any stage, asking what was effective or difficult, and giving themselves time to consider questions such as:

What is the team doing?
What did I do?
What might I do differently?
How do I proceed?
What is my role?

With these questions in mind, I move on to what is now deemed by many in the field to be a vital source of support for team coaches, that of supervision or reflection on practice. Indeed, supervision for team coaches is now designated mandatory for accreditation by at least two of the professional coaching bodies: ICF and EMCC.

The role of supervision for team coaches

In these next sections, I define supervision, I look at the role of the supervisor and what coaches bring to supervision. I then introduce a diagram map, 'Mapping the territory of team coaching' (see page 9) to provide a method that enables the team coach with their supervisor to reflect on their practice (Hodge 2021).

There are numerous definitions of coaching supervision (e.g. Proctor 2000, Hawkins & Smith 2013, Hodge 2016, Hodge & Clutterbuck 2019b). Briefly, supervision might be described as a regular, reflective dialogue between coach (supervisee) and supervisor with the purpose of making sense of and providing the platform to understand what might be happening in any one assignment. Supervision is also the reflective space for the coach to look at their learning, ongoing development, effectiveness, and wellbeing.

While there are many definitions of supervision, I describe it as:

'A co-created learning relationship (between coach and supervisor) that supports the coach personally and professionally with the purpose of providing best practice to their client. Through the process of reflection and dialogue, the coach explores client related issues and considers how they themselves influence and impact on the coaching...'

Through the relationship and dialogue with the supervisor, coaches can receive feedback, broaden their perspectives, generate new ideas and approaches and at the same time maintain standards of practice.’ (Hodge 2016)

There are several ways a team coach may engage in supervision. I now briefly describe these with some of the advantages and disadvantages of each.

One-to-one supervision: Allows the team coach to have dedicated time for themselves to explore specific issues about an assignment or their own development in the safe, confidential space that they co-create with their supervisor. Inevitably this provides just one perspective with the supervisor. This approach enables the coach to explore deeply (but not exclusively) their own process of working in groups and the emotional and psychological impact the work may be having on them.

Dyad supervision: More often now, team coaches are engaging as dyads or pairs in their client team assignments and thus engage in supervision together. This forum allows the two coaches not only to share their different perspectives on what is happening in the client system, but also to look at what might be happening with and to each other that may need to be addressed so they can show up in their client systems as a team. Having a shared, facilitated forum is valuable, but may have limitations if there is discord between the two coaches. Addressing any discord is vital to ensure the dyad is congruent and united when working with their client team, and to ensure the two coaches are explicit about their differences with each other.

Group supervision: It may be argued that group supervision is the ideal platform for team coaching supervision. With a group of perhaps three or four other practitioners (often all of them being team coaches), the practitioner gains multiple perspectives from other members of the group. The additional insights this may elicit enriches the coach’s understanding and awareness of what might be happening to themselves and in the client system.

What do team coaches bring to supervision?

Based on recent research (Clutterbuck & Hodge 2017, Graves 2021), team coaches are looking for support and challenge in supervision that gives them awareness of what might be happening within the whole and wider client system. The coach may arrive in supervision anxious about their effectiveness to coach the client team to meet their goals. While it is not the coach’s responsibility to do this alone, in supervision they want to:

- Gain clarity around the often-changing situation and context within which the team is operating
- Explore what might be happening in terms of group and team dynamics with the multiple relationships that exist in any team
- Offload and resolve their fears or confusion
- Process what is actually happening at any stage in their assignments
- Receive support for the impact that this may be having on their own confidence

- Re-ground themselves while so much is happening outside of their control
- Re-clarify their own role and purpose

The recurring agenda that team coaches bring to supervision include:

- The coach or the team's sense of stuckness
- The unpredictability of what is happening with and around the team
- The transient levels of commitment shown by team members and the constant fluctuation in the relationships within the team
- Confusion or misunderstanding around the purpose, who will be involved, who is responsible for what, who is making the decisions
- Contracting between coach and team throughout an assignment

The role of the supervisor of team coaching

With these issues arising, it is therefore not surprising that team coaches have demonstrated their willingness to engage in supervision to support them in this practice (Graves 2021).

I believe that the supervisor's role is one of creating a container that enables the coach to resource themselves, to gain clarity in their identity, their role and purpose, as well as their approach. Particularly when supervising team coaches, the supervisor may invite the coach to stand back from their client situation to examine the team and the work as it develops through different stages. A key intention for the supervisor includes raising awareness of the coach's role, tasks and boundaries of responsibility within the complexity – and at times messiness – of an assignment. By raising awareness, the coach can gain perspective and at the same time be learning.

The supervisor seeks to co-create and provide the container for the coach to notice and explore such self-doubt or loss of confidence, perhaps at the same time wondering together if these feelings are the coach's alone or are present in some or all the team (Thornton 2019). Throughout the ongoing process of reflection, the supervisor looks to support the coach to develop and hone their skills to integrate into their practice (Hodge 2021).

What the team coach might expect from their supervisor

Clear agreement around what is realistic to address or achieve in supervision:

- A commitment to allocate adequate time for the supervision (45-60 minute sessions are usually too short to untangle client team issues and explore to find clarity)
- Keep up to date with emerging research, literature and learning around team coaching and associated supervision
- Develop a clear framework to enable coach and supervisor around the knowledge and skills that the team coach needs to learn, develop and sustain

A developed understanding of group dynamics and systems (e.g. Bion 1968, Yalom 1985, Hawkins et al 2014, Thornton 2019, Woudstra 2024):

- The supervisor will hold a systemic perspective that includes the multiple relationships within and beyond the team and attends to group dynamics
- The supervisor will draw on their own personal experience of working with teams or groups and how this may inform what may be happening in the supervisees' teams and wider systems
- The supervisor will seek to balance the coach's needs for self-awareness and development alongside those of the team that enables them to meet the purpose of the coaching

Holding the supervision boundary:

- Focus on supervising the team coach and not get hooked into the urge to coach the team or become involved in the team's system
- Hold the whole system in mind
- Focus on the whole team with all the participants rather than any one specific individual
- Develop and support the coach's capacity to work with groups
- Provide containment and continuity to the coach who may become off-balance with the turbulence of the work and the demands of both the client system and wider world events

As team coaches need extensive knowledge and skills for this work, so too do supervisors who work with and support team coaches. Here are some of the capacities and knowledge the team coach may expect from their supervisor:

- Experience of both one-to-one and team coaching
- Strong academic or psychological background
- Professional qualification in supervision
- Grounding and skill in managing group process and group facilitation
- Ideally, experience in working in and/or leading a team, and an appreciation of the potential scope for team coaching
- Familiarity with organisational structures, including in global, cross-cultural contexts

Mapping the territory of team coaching

So far, we have identified that team coaching is more complex and thus potentially more challenging and demanding for everyone involved – i.e. team coaches, client team and the supervisor – than may be experienced in one-to-one executive coaching. While models of team coaching are emerging (e.g. Clutterbuck 2010, Hawkins 2014, Graves 2021, Derlopas 2023, Widdowson & Barbour 2025, Woudstra 2025), here I share a method that enables the team coach with their supervisor to reflect on the coach and their work (Hodge 2021).

I have developed a visual diagram or map (see page 9) informed by the work of Bateson (2017). She offers the concept of 'warm data' that invites us to move away

from a mechanistic or linear approach to change and attend to inter-relationality and interdependency. She advocates the need to build capacity and capability to interact with the complexity of 'evolving living systems' that may not be represented easily in a structured, linear model. Bateson invites us to explore 'how interactions in complex systems interlink. These... increase our ability to take into account the integrity of multi-layered systems.'

My intention with this map is not to create another model of team coaching but rather to represent visually the territory of a team coaching assignment with its many factors and layers, to represent visually the complexity and interconnectedness of the work. I acknowledge the limitation of a static, two-dimensional image in being able to communicate the fluidity and at times chaotic quality of what may be happening in the territory where this work takes place. However, the diagram map (see next page) represents this territory (Hodge 2021).

I invite the reader to imagine the territory and all its factors as being like a living system in the natural world, such as a forest. Imagine the diverse species of animals, plants, insects, trees and fungi all cohabiting, coexisting, and interacting with each other in the shared space. This environment is in constant motion and flux, with changing weather conditions and seasons. All the different species in this natural world interconnect and are interdependent.

With such an image in mind, let's now return to the world of team coaching. The team coaches together with their supervisor can explore this territory with the constantly changing interactions and dynamics of all the parts of the system, along with the impact they have on each other. Each factor within the overall territory involves multiple elements that may be considered, and that I now discuss (Hodge 2021, Hodge in Derlopas 2023).

Coach or coaches

The challenge for team coaches and their supervisors is where to focus attention over the period of an assignment, and thus within any given supervision session. In supervision, the coach may wish to stand beside the supervisor outside the client territory and notice what factors are in the foreground at any given stage. There is no right place for the coach to place themselves either within or outside the territory. We have already discussed the sort of issues or concerns the coach brings to supervision. At the heart of the coach's personal reflections lies the question of how they balance their roles and responsibilities with their capacity to coach a team.

Coaching framework

With emerging models of team coaching, the team coach now needs to develop their own framework of team coaching that includes their purpose, their philosophy, and the theories and models that inform their approach, along with the key skills and capabilities that support their effectiveness. Many new team coaches would do well to develop a coaching framework that demonstrates their understanding of adult learning, adult development,



team learning, team development, and group process (Clutterbuck 2007; Hawkins, 2014; Leary-Joyce & Lines 2018, Woudstra 2025).

Individual participants

As the coach considers each participant in the client team, they need to notice any personal patterns of individuals in the client system and their engagement with the coaching process. Individuals will have personal motivations and preferred aptitude and methods of participating in the team, possibly informed by previous personal history (e.g. Thornton 2016, Whittington 2020). The Milan Approach to systemic therapy (Campbell, Draper, Crutchley 1991) may inform the coach in terms of emphasis on growth and the participants' ability to make choices, acknowledging the art of this process (rather than being mechanistic and following a fixed pathway), allowing curiosity and how this informs what might be happening.

Leadership

There is usually a nominal, ostensible team leader, at least in terms of title or function. However, their effectiveness depends on their experience, skills and understanding of their role and responsibilities. Questions may emerge here around explicit seniority alongside implicit power and authority. It sometimes emerges that the leader does not hold the psychological leadership of the team, and this may only show up when the team comes together and begins to relate (Hawkins 2014, Thornton 2019, Graves 2021).

Contracting

Contracting involves the explicit and the implicit. Coaches need to contract and re-contract at every stage of the assignment, defining and sometimes redefining the purpose of the work with all the stakeholders. Practical details such as the number of sessions, their frequency and duration, and the types of intervention, may appear straightforward. However, often undisclosed are the individual needs, assumptions and expectations of the team members, and these are likely to change. The coach may also facilitate individual members to contract with each other and the leader. It is imperative that the coach monitors team members' engagement and participation through regular re-contracting around what is happening within the team and in the wider system (Carroll 2005, Hay 2007, Turner & Hawkins 2016, Woudstra 2025).

Teams

This area covers the stages of group and team development. The team may not actually be functioning as a team to start with. The team's development is not a simple, linear trajectory toward effectiveness or high performance (Thornton 2016 & 2019, Widdowson & Barbour 2025, Hawkins & Carr 2025). Over time, it is highly likely that team membership changes. Participants' personal circumstances and relationships may also change. Team coaches need to be mindful of this possibly erratic process and the impact of changing members on

the team's progress, both real and perceived (e.g. Kantor 2012, Wageman & Lowe 2019, Hawkins & Carr 2025).

Psychological phenomena

What the team coach may observe or experience here may be difficult to name and work with. We all come to groups or teams, consciously or unconsciously, with our personal history of being in previous groups. Participants are influenced by their family of origin, their parental and sibling relationships, and thus what each person may hope for or assume in terms of identity, power, control or competition. Each member in a team brings their own psychological needs and assumptions to such work. The team coach needs to be mindful of how everyone contributes to co-creating the trust and safety that enables the team to grow and develop (Bion 1968, Kantor 2012; Thornton 2016, Edmondson 2024, Woudstra 2025).

Relationships

Closely linked with the psychological phenomena that occur often at an unconscious level, the team coach would do well to explore the multiple relationships that are likely to pre-exist before the work starts (both explicit and implicit). These relationships are likely to be with and between team members, with stakeholders outside the team, as well as their relationship with the organisation itself (Whittington 2020). The coach may also explore the expectations and assumptions team members hold for the coach. For example: is the coach the rescuer for the team? As an outsider, is the coach a threat? How does the arrival of this external team coach impact on participants' identities, roles and team dynamics in this relational system (Thornton 2019)? Emotional intelligence (Bharwaney 2015) that encourages collaboration can make a positive impact, but may take time to achieve, especially in multi-cultural teams (Whelan 2005).

Culture of the organisation

Customs and culture can play an important role in determining the team's progress. Assumptions around a culture of 'this is how we do things around here' needs to be explored particularly when teams are geographically and culturally diverse. Language too may play a part in highlighting differences and similarities in understanding, and how the work of the coaching takes place. Factors such as team structures, responsibility for outcomes, and individual and group accountability, affect the outcome of the work (Bharwaney et al 2019).

Collective intelligence

Collective intelligence correlates with individual group members' ability to reason about the mental states of others (Woolley et al 2010), and how this may contribute to shared sense-making. It may depend on the composition of the team or group and can contribute to changes in the way group members interact when they come together – for example, in conversational turn-taking behaviour (Woolley et al 2010).

Wider system

At the time of writing, our wider, global context seems utterly unpredictable. As a result, while the best laid plans and intentions at the start of a team coaching assignment are clear and agreed, unexpected political, economic, societal and ecological events arise. These influences are beyond the control of both coaches and client teams. They are likely to have an impact on the team's capacity to engage in and commit to the coaching. The team coach needs to develop their resilience, patience and compassion to walk alongside the client team and be flexible in accepting and facilitating the team to distil or update their intentions and outcomes.

Progress review

Within any team coaching assignment, it is vital that the team coach contracts with the client, including all stakeholders, the process and timing of any reviews of progress and project evaluation. In supervision, team coaches often share their frustration when there is a slow rate of progress or in fact a perceived or apparent absence of progress. In supervision, the coach can explore their own and the team's expectations for what is realistic before trying to take too much responsibility for attempting to drive the team to meet their outcomes. Questions that may be useful are: Where are you as the team heading? How will you know that you are making progress as a team?

Ethics and dilemmas

It is commonly recognised that coaches take ethical dilemmas to supervision, where they explore and resolve questions of best practice where there are different schools of thought. The ethical questions that may arise in team coaching include whether the team coach should offer one-to-one coaching to the team leader while working with the whole team. Another dilemma might arise when the team leader wants the team coach to work with two members of team if they have a clash in their relationship, while working with the whole team. Or what is the team coach's stance on coaching all the individual members of the team, as well as the intact team? Word count does not allow definitive answers here, and maybe this highlights the value of supervision, where such questions can be explored and addressed (Carroll, 2013).

To conclude this review of the territory of team coaching, there are several options for team coaches and their supervisors. The map is intentionally non-linear, as I would like coaches and their supervisors to enjoy its fluidity. Readers may use it simply as a checklist to choose a specific direction for reflection. It may help to highlight what may be missing, or to identify blind spots either in the team coach's practice or for the team.

As with the work of team coaching, this territory is in constant motion, and when something happens in one area, all the other areas are affected. While I invited the reader to imagine going into a forest, another image that may capture the process and practice of team coaching is that of a pinball machine or kaleidoscope. When something changes as it

inevitably does, so another factor may come into the foreground. I hope readers can engage with this and hold lightly to the idea that while striving for certainty and forward motion, nothing is constant except change.

Coaches may hope to work their way methodically around all the factors in a sequence when they come to reflect. This may be worth experimenting with to see whether addressing all the factors provides greater appreciation of what might be happening in the client system. I hope that what is clear from this discussion is that when something in one factor moves, the whole configuration changes, and another factor may come into the foreground or gain relevance or significance.

Summary

In drawing this paper to a close, let me summarise what we have explored. In the context of this developing field of coaching practice with teams, it is clear how complex and potentially demanding this work is for the team coach. It is not just a simple transfer of one-to-one skills into the team context, and coaches need to expand their range of knowledge, skills and capabilities.

As the team coach gains practical experience, the issues they meet are many and varied. They can resolve some of their questions alone, but with the physical and psychological demands involved in this level of group work, practitioners are increasingly seeking support in the form of supervision. Here there are various supervision options (individual, group or dyad) where the coach takes time to pause, reflect, resolve dilemmas and gain clarity for their next steps. This container of supervision offers the platform for support, rejuvenation, grounding and learning.

The supervisor may or may not be a practising team coach. But it is important that they have established knowledge of teams and the practice of team coaching, that they understand groups and group process, and that they are experienced supervisors and are familiar with organisations and complex adaptive systems. To make the most of supervision, the coach needs to feel safe to share their own fallibility; and the supervisor needs to be skilled in creating containment and a steady platform that enables both coach and supervisor to explore this work together, with curiosity and compassion within the complexity.

If you would like to discuss working together in supervision, please feel free to contact me here.

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