Academic Paper

What do the experiences of team coaches tell us about the essential elements of team coaching?

Gillian Graves ✉

Abstract

There has been a surge of interest in team coaching in recent years, however understanding of the process, based on the first-person perspective of team coaches, is lacking. This qualitative study was conducted using heuristic inquiry methodology, enhanced by the inclusion of focus groups. This process enabled shared learning, expanded thinking and knowledge development amongst the co-researchers over an eleven-month period. The study sheds light on the emergent practice of team coaching from the team coach's perspective. The findings challenge concepts in the existing literature, add to existing knowledge as well as opening up new areas for debate. The findings have considerable potential to inform practice, and the coaching profession, by providing insight and a practical resource in the form of the PiE Team Coaching Model☐ and accompanying framework. These resources detail universal elements, as well as typical variations, for team coaches to consider in their practice.

Keywords

team coaching, supervision, heuristic inquiry,

Introduction and Literature Review

As a practising dyadic coach for more than 20 years I have witnessed the emergence of team coaching and snowballing of interest in it as a distinct form of coaching. The number of organisations seeking team coaching is growing, practising dyadic coaches are adopting their approaches to meet this demand and the array of team coaching courses and accreditations is increasing (O'Connor and Cavanagh, 2017). Commensurate with this rise in interest has been a growth in team coaching publications (Clutterbuck, 2007; Hawkins, 2011; Thornton, 2010; Leary-Joyce and Lines, 2017; Clutterbuck, Gannon et al, 2019) informed by espoused theory and practitioners conceptualising their practice.

However, despite this increase in interest, even the most cursory review of the literature reveals a plethora of conceptualisations of team coaching including arguments that its primary purpose is "developmental", "relational", "systemic" or focussing on "performance". Jones et al (2019) identify 15 definitions of team coaching including six dimensions on which these definitions diverge.

In keeping with the emergent and evolving understanding of team coaching I conducted my review of the salient literature adopting a broadly chronological approach, commencing with some of the original and significant research prior to exploring the body of practitioner-led literature followed by the academic/empirical studies. This chronological approach is represented in figure 1.

Figure 1: The chronological flow of the literature
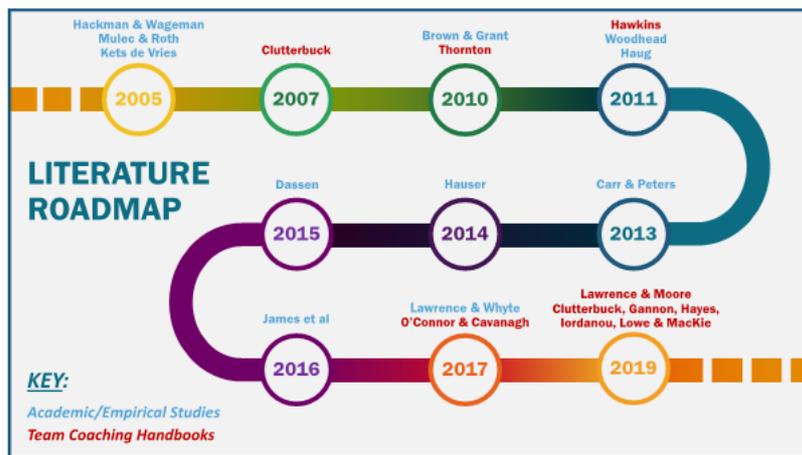
My literature review commenced with Hackman and Wageman's (2005) seminal article, comprising an extensive literature review, definition and conceptualisation of team coaching. Hackman and Wageman's (2005) research is frequently quoted as the academic authority on what we know about team coaching (Traylor, Stahr and Salas, 2020; Peters and Carr, 2019) and the first significant piece of empirical research and definition of team coaching as:

A direct interaction with a team intended to help members make co-ordinated and task-appropriate use of their collective resources in accomplishing the team's work (Hackman and Wageman, 2005 p. 269).

Hackman and Wageman (2005) make a substantial contribution to the knowledge of team coaching in drawing together and detailing various approaches to team coaching, as well as introducing a number of key considerations when embarking on team coaching. One of these is the concept of team members' "readiness for coaching". Another relates to the timing of team coaching interventions with reference to Gersick's (1988) research on team development.

The concept of team coaching proposed by Hackman and Wageman is primarily that of a manager operating as an internal coach and working with a project team or team performing tasks with a lifecycle comprising of a beginning, middle and end. This conceptualisation of team coaching is less relevant for more current interventions whereby an external coach works with an intact team collectively. However, in introducing the terminology of "readiness for coaching" and "temporal markers" to influence the timing of interventions, Hackman and Wageman (2005) raise considerations which have continued to be explored in subsequent literature (Clutterbuck 2007; Hawkins 2011; Peters and Carr, 2013).

The decade following Hackman and Wageman's (2005) study witnessed an intensification of interest in team coaching and the rapid growth of team coaching practice. The condition of the

literature for the period 2005-2015 is of note as academic interest has lagged notably behind practitioner engagement leading to a rich array of practitioner contributions including models and team coaching manuals, contrasting with a paucity of empirical research based on rigorous research standards. Research on team coaching has largely emerged in the form of practical case studies (Traylor, Stahr and Salas, 2020). Peters and Carr (2019) posit that the knowledge base is growing, the number of studies on team coaching outcomes has "grown vastly" since Grant's (2009) annotated bibliography and more than doubled since their own previous review in 2013, rising from 13 to 33. However, despite these assertions, the overall number of studies is still small, particularly when compared with dyadic coaching. It is also of note that, of the 17 academic/empirical studies identified by Peters and Carr, 12 of these involved the team leader acting as a coach, making the number of academic/empirical studies in which the coach was an external coach very small indeed.

When assessing the contribution towards the ongoing development of knowledge and understanding of team coaching, both practitioner and academic contributions can be seen to have different, but important, contributions. Whilst the academic contributions provide much needed and scarce references to empirical study, practitioner literature has provided an ongoing dialogue on the development of team coaching. This is particularly evident in the number of "thought leaders" who have continued to develop and publish their current thinking on team coaching over an extended period of time including: Clutterbuck (2007; 2019); Hawkins (2011; 2019) and Thornton (2010; 2019).

Hauser (2014) represents a departure in the literature whereby the voice of the team coach takes centre stage and we see team coaching through the first-hand experience of the team coach. Hauser (2014) takes themes raised in earlier research, adding an additional layer of understanding from the team coach's perspective. For example, the concept of "readiness" (Hackman and Wageman, 2005; Brown and Grant, 2010) is defined as the "team's ability and willingness both to work together as a team and to be coached" (p.59) with Hauser giving voice to how this is experienced by the team coach.

Lawrence and Whyte (2017) similarly foreground the team coach, providing an insight into how team coaches work with teams and lessons learned through experience. Echoing Dassen (2015), Lawrence and Whyte (2017) highlight the significance of being aware of group "contagion" and of managing self, for example understanding how insecurity can show up in the way the coach operates either becoming enmeshed in the system or pushing it away.

Both Hauser (2014) and Lawrence and Whyte (2017) utilise short semi-structured telephone interviews in which team coaches were asked to recall experiences which were then analysed to distil the data into themes. What is missing is the richness of the individual team coach voices, including reflections captured during or immediately after events, and the absence of any visual clues emerging and captured during the interview.

Some of this richness is provided in James et al's (2016 p. 3, 6) auto ethnographical study of team coaching in which James explores her team coaching practice "through my communications, my actions and ways of being" and draws on "the rich experiences of working alongside my clients and responding to their needs". The resultant research describes not only what James does in her team coaching but, most importantly, how this work impacts on her personally. These experiences include the process of contracting with individual team members, with James contrasting her own experience with that of "best practice" espoused by Thornton (2010) and Hawkins (2011) in the literature.

Whilst James et al (2016) provide a useful perspective on how espoused theory translates into practice, it is based on the experiences of one team coach working with one team. As a research-practitioner I felt that a similar process, with different teams in different organisations, as well as the opportunity for team coaches to reflect and shape their experiences through dialogue with other

practising team coaches, would provide a richer and broader understanding of how the process of team coaching is experienced by team coaches.

I formulated a simple research question: What do the experiences of team coaches tell us about the essential elements of team coaching? I deliberately chose the word "essential" as I wanted to uncover the aspects of team coaching that were deemed absolutely necessary or indispensable, pertaining to the essence of team coaching. Elements that did not have the same level of importance in other team interventions. Uncovering these essential elements would, I believed, both add to the understanding of what team coaching is as well as how these elements are created and experienced by team coaches.

In the next section I describe the methodology I adopted for the study. This is followed by the main findings and a discussion of the significance of these. I end this article with my conclusions, highlighting the study's contribution to knowledge and practice as well as suggestions for further research.

Methodology

As a researcher my philosophical assumptions are in line with social constructionism focussing upon the development of meaning and knowledge through social engagement, interaction and interpretation. Social constructionism suggests that there are "knowledges" rather than "knowledge" and that the same phenomenon or event can be described in different ways (Willig, 2007).

From the outset, the purpose of my research was to explore the experience of team coaching from the perspective of team coaches. The subjective nature of experiences and perceptions suggests a phenomenological approach and I adopted a heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) methodology for the study. Heuristic inquiry is particularly appropriate due to its search to discover the nature and meaning of lived experience, in this case of team coaching (Sultan, 2019). Heuristic inquiry benefits from the researcher being present throughout the process and being conscious of personal thoughts, actions, feelings and behaviour, during and post practice. Additionally, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge, including comparing their experience with that of others (Bachkirova, 2016).

In addition to the personal knowledge of the phenomenon and involvement in the research of the principal researcher, heuristic inquiry is also distinguished from other phenomenological approaches, by the selection of co-researchers who can engage in collaborative inquiry (Patton, 2015). I had entered into team coaching having practised dyadic coaching for many years and was particularly interested in the specific coaching activities that take place in team coaching and how these are similar/different to dyadic coaching. In addition, my experience was that of an external team coach working with a team in an organisation, rather than that of an internal coach or team leader practising team coaching in an organisation they were part of. I therefore believed that it was important to work with co-researchers who similarly had a background in dyadic coaching and who were also working as external team coaches as this would enable us all to explore similarities/differences between dyadic and team coaching from our own experiences.

I extended Moustakas' (1990) requirement that the investigator must have a "direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated" (p.4) to all of my co-researchers, stipulating that participation in the research was subject to participants having at least five years' experience working as coaches, some experience of team coaching and be currently practising team coaching. In addition, they needed to be members of a professional coaching body and practising coaching in line with the body's professional and ethical codes of practice.

I sought participation from ten practicing team coaches, interested in exploring their personal experiences of team coaching. This sample size was complementary to the heuristic inquiry approach (Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 2015; Sultan, 2019) where the intent is not to generalise information but to elucidate the specifics and the richness of individual cases (Cresswell, 2018). I used purposive sampling (Robson, 2011) to select co-researchers, using professional coaching networks and forums and the snowball sampling approach (Bryman, 2004). In this study, the knowledge created comes from the combined experiences of me as the primary researcher, with ten other team coaches sharing the exploration as co-researchers.

The study commenced with an orientation focus group which was used to share perceptions of team coaching and agree on the subsequent reflective review process. All co-researchers then maintained reflective logs over a period of six months, emailing their reflections to me.

I conducted interviews with my co-researchers with all but two of these taking place face-to-face, using dedicated meeting spaces, free from interruptions and noise. These interviews took the form of "informal conversational interviews" (Patton, 2015, p.437-438) as recommended by Moustakas (1990, p.47) and were also used to explore insights and themes emerging from the co-researchers' reflective logs.

The recordings from the orientation focus group and interviews were transcribed by a third party after which I undertook thematic analysis of these, together with the emailed reflections, searching for patterns and themes (Patton, 2015). Since the orientation focus group, I had been noting in my research journal any themes that seemed to be recurring and I set these up as an initial set of codes in NVivo. Working systematically, I then worked through each co-researcher's data (focus group, reflections and interview transcriptions), coding text to existing codes and adding new codes as necessary. The heuristic approach acknowledges that patterns and themes will evolve and that it is necessary to group and re-group the data in order to experience complete immersion. This was certainly the case in this study with the NVivo analysis resulting in a long list of codes and a need for me to shift my thinking to noticing patterns and themes running throughout the data. Gradually patterns emerged in the form of repeated key words/phrases. These notable words and phrases were transposed onto Post-it notes and, using repetitions, recurring metaphors and coaching/psychotherapeutic theory were clustered together to form emerging themes.

As patterns and themes emerged, I created a poster for each key theme comprising: a short summary of the theme, any related sub themes and several verbatim quotes from co-researchers to bring these themes to life. I then shared these posters at a second focus group, the creative synthesis focus group, to validate the findings and, through discussion, gain a deeper and richer understanding of the essential elements of team coaching.

The final stage of my analysis was to develop a comprehensive framework of team coaching which I shared with my co researchers at the validation focus group. I spent the intervening weeks between the two focus groups creating this framework which I again transferred on to large posters and we discussed together. After this focus group I listened to the audio recording of the session and read the transcription prior to making any necessary modifications to my framework of team coaching.

The development of a team coaching framework was one of the objectives of my study and is a comprehensive document spanning several pages. Having reached this stage, I created my own personal "creative synthesis" of this framework (which is a feature of the heuristic inquiry methodology), bringing together all of the elements that had emerged into a total experience, showing patterns and relationships. The resulting PiE Team Coaching Model® is both a "creative synthesis" and a team coaching model.

Findings

As the study progressed team coaching emerged as a process taking place over an extended period of time, with a sense of movement, direction and change. There is a preparation phase, an intervention phase and the final evaluation phase when the activity has ceased and the highlights, challenges and learning are reflected upon. These three phases, Preparation, Intervention and Evaluation became the core themes for the study.

Preparation

Many of the preparation elements of team coaching take the form of considerations that need to be thought through, decisions made and data gathering that needs to take place prior to commencing team coaching sessions with the whole team. Some of these questions are encapsulated in the following themes: working with a co team coach; coaching team members alongside team coaching and gaining insight from team members/stakeholders.

Working with a co team coach

Co-researchers' responses to the practice of working with a co team coach spread across a spectrum. For some working with a co team coach is central to their practice, the work is planned based on two coaches, and the only decision to be made is who the team coach might choose to work with. This approach is typified by Bob.

Another philosophy is, there're two of us, 99% of the time there are two coaches on the basis that we will provide a range of personalities, experiences, insights, four eyes are better than two.

However, there was not unanimous support for co team coaching with concern expressed about the additional dynamic this brought to the work with two team coaches in the room and different relationships at play. Size of team is a key consideration with a general consensus that if a team size is eight or under the team coach would "happily do it by myself" (Monica). Above this number the challenge for the team coach is mentally and physically demanding with so much going on, dynamics at play and the coach having no respite.

Coaching team members alongside team coaching

Whilst team coaching is a process of a team coach working with a team, a number of separate arrangements between the team coach and team members might exist alongside, but outside, the team context. These include coaching team members on a one-to-one basis as well as the close working relationship fostered with the team leader. In describing their team coaching practice, all co-researchers outlined their personal decision criteria, ethical and boundary considerations relating to individual coaching.

Opinions on having individual coaching arrangements with the team leader during the course of the team coaching assignment, were quite divided with views ranging from "it's essential" to "I never do this" as displayed in figure 1.

Figure 2: Perspectives on coaching the team leader

The question of whether to coach team members, or not, alongside a team coaching assignment met with a similar spectrum of responses as the question regarding coaching the team leader. However, philosophical positions on this question were less fixed. Most co-researchers outlined an emergent approach to coaching team members and described how they were experimenting with this in their team coaching practice.

Although there were differing views on coaching the team leader, there was general acknowledgement that the leader needs preferential treatment as they are the most exposed member of the team and their level of vulnerability will be a factor in how open the team will be. Practically this typically involves meeting with the team leader prior to a team coaching session, giving them a quick snapshot of the initial diagnostic results before the first debrief "so they don't get alarmed or surprised by anything" (Bob) and having high level, structured conversations with the team leader, before meeting with the rest of the team, to both get their impressions and also build trust.

Gaining insight from team members/stakeholders

All co-researchers emphasised the importance of gaining insight from team members and stakeholders before embarking on a team coaching assignment, although how they gained this insight, and the degree to which they insisted upon it, varied. Although not necessarily recognising gaining insight as a "red line", without which they would not engage in a piece of work, several co-researchers described an approach that appeared non-negotiable. John mused;

I think I probably don't have any real red lines, but I would say that's the way I like to do it, therefore this is what it will all cost. So that's what I'm contracting for and if you decide not to do it well let's talk this through. …With team coaching I don't think I've ever not done it that way because it helps me to feel comfortable … So yes, I say yes, it's a red line!

Having one-to-one meetings serves a number of purposes. An obvious benefit is that they are useful for picking up themes and trends in the organisation, key issues facing the team and to ensure that these are heard from all team members and not just from a selected few. Kennedy observed;

In systemic terms it's everybody's individual truth. So, what is it really like to be a member of this team? What's your truth as you sit in this team, as you work in this team?

For most co-researchers the practice of having one-to-one sessions had been reinforced by challenging previous experiences. Several used the analogy of having been "bitten on the bum" in the past. Co-researchers highlighted the importance of hearing the unblemished "truth" and also the importance of using one-to-ones as an opportunity to build trust.

Intervention

The intervention phase of team coaching encompasses a number of themes including: creating optional conditions for safety and growth; challenging performance; providing direction: roles and adopted and roles that the team coach may be drawn into.

Creating optimal conditions for safety and growth

All co-researchers stressed the importance of a safe space being created between the team coach, the leader and team members. Whilst agreeing that this was a fundamental requirement, there were some different approaches to establishing this. For Anita it was "psychological safety", team members "getting to know me as much as they need to". Co-researchers identified how they used coaching skills, honed from years practising dyadic coaching, to create a safe team space. An example would be Grace who emphasised the importance of listening as "probably the most important thing… listening with my head, my heart, my ears, my eyes, the whole thing".

Creating a safe space was something all co-researchers worked hard to establish at the outset but was also constant work in progress throughout an assignment. The ability to role model behaviours for a team was common practice. However, there were divergent approaches in what co-researchers chose to role model. Bob described how he deliberately used humour as a "way of making contact with me; of showing that it's not life and death". Monica shared how she would role model confusion or vulnerability in a deliberate attempt to normalise these feelings.

I will role model saying, "I don't know" or "I'm confused right now" or "I'm puzzled". So, I show them how it's possible to be confident and yet there are occasions not to know and to ask the question and to say how you feel.

Closely aligned to psychological safety was the importance of building trust. In the 'Preparation' phase meeting with team members individually was regarded as an invaluable means of gathering information on the team and team members. In addition, these sessions served as an important opportunity to start building trust with team members.

Challenging performance

Another key theme emerging from the study was providing challenge. All co-researchers described how they would challenge the team collectively as well as individual members of the team. However, the form this challenge took varied considerably ranging from high challenge, provocative interventions, to less direct approaches. Joy recalled how she could be "quite direct" and being very comfortable "calling out" behaviour. Monica labelled her style as "asking provocative questions" and "a lot of pushing back".

Whilst still using the term "challenging", other co-researchers outlined a style of challenge that was less provocative and direct and only used in particular circumstances. This form of challenge was often referred to in the form of a metaphor or analogy. The most commonly used analogy was that of "holding up the mirror", a technique of holding the space and inviting team members to look closely at themselves and their actions.

The team coach's philosophical grounding in coaching appeared to be intertwined with their approach to challenging the team and how they presented challenge. As Gestalt practitioners Anita and Bob described how the use of self was a key technique for them, recognising how something was impacting on them and verbalising it with others. Anita spoke about "bringing it into the here and now and raising awareness for how what they're experiencing is impacting on them and others".

Providing direction: roles adopted

Whilst recognising that they tried to spend most of their time in the "coach" role, all co-researchers acknowledged that there were other roles that they consciously adopted on occasion, especially roles which involved providing some input and direction for the team. The roles of mentor/expert; teacher/trainer; facilitator and referee emerged as roles which co-researchers felt had some legitimacy in team coaching. The roles were discussed at the creative synthesis focus group and, whilst there were some diverging views on how much a given role should be present in team coaching, there was convergence on the descriptions of each role when it was performed appropriately, as well as what was happening when the role was overplayed. These descriptions are summarised in table 1.

Table 1: Providing direction – roles adopted by the team coach

Roles - Adopted	Performed well	Overplayed
Mentor/expert	Bringing in outside knowledge eg of industry trends or the wider strategic perspective for the team to accept, reject or keep. Sharing of knowledge to provide insight/perspective.	The coach is talking too much, sharing too much of own expertise with the team, giving their opinion. It's more about the coach than about the team. A role that can be projected onto the team coach by the team.
Teacher/trainer	Transferring a lot of what the team coach does as skills to the team, sometimes through demonstrating the process (eg listening, asking questions, observational feedback) and sometimes through explaining eg sharing a model to explain what might be going on in the team	Doing too much of the talking, over sharing of models or theory Feeling the pressure to 'give value for money'
Facilitator	Facilitating the process, designing the day, the flow of the session, the room, seating, creating and holding some structure and the time	Grabbing the markers and flip-charting the discussions, starting to drive the agenda, pumping in my energy into the room, being too active, filling silences Feeling uncomfortable. To divert attention elsewhere
Referee	Managing the process, helping the team make proactive, deliberate choices about what they're doing in the moment rather than being too free-flowing that it just flows away. Pointing out when 'we're off the pitch' eg not living out values, or going off topic	If overplayed can become the 'marshal', being too directive with the team.

Roles the team coach may be drawn into

One inherent risk of working with a team for a lengthy period of time is "group contagion", with the team coach gradually losing a sense of distance and objectivity and effectively turning into a team member. Another aspect of "group contagion" is the danger of starting to "collude" with team members. This danger appeared to be more prevalent with co-researchers who described their coaching style as strongly empathic with self-knowledge that they could at times be overly supportive of their coachees. As someone who recognised this pattern in herself, Liza shared the dangers of being "sucked into" being overly supportive of the team, "it really is tough for you guys", or of responding to the invitation, "what do you think we should do?" resulting in becoming a "decision maker".

The role of "de facto" team leader emerged as the role that co-researchers were in most danger of assuming. Two clear reasons were identified by co-researchers – one being a sense of being pulled into the role due to a perceived vacuum with a lack of strong leadership in the team. Grace acknowledged how she was "pulled" into the team leader role, as well as the signs that she was starting to assume the role.

The pseudo team leadership role – I've done that as well! That's a natural position for me. I think it's when you feel as if there's a bit of a vacuum there. Usually the team leader is not doing it or doesn't really know how to do it.

The second reason related to the co-researcher's own background, the fact that they had led large senior teams in the past and the team leader role felt very natural and comfortable. Here there was more of a sense of a "push" from the co-researcher, them getting overly involved and starting to assume the leader role.

All of the co-researchers in the study were very familiar with transactional analysis. It was, therefore, not surprising that there were a significant number of references to ego states, especially critical parent and nurturing parent, descriptions of the Karpman drama triangle in action and of co-researchers being "hooked" or "triggered" into different roles by team members' behaviour.

The "nurturing parent" ego state was widely cited by co-researchers as a role they were aware that they moved into with some aspects of the ego state regarded as positive. For Jackie "nurturing parent" had a valid role in ensuring that no one was talked over and that "everyone's voice is heard". The challenge appeared to be when the co-researcher became too drawn into the nurturing parent ego state or found themselves in "rescuer" role. Consistent terms were used to describe this sense of being too involved including "feeling sorry" for team members; a desire to "help out" or "look after" team members or "sort it out" for them.

Almost the same number of examples of being triggered into "critical parent" were provided as being pulled into "nurturing parent", however, in terms of their experiences of being pulled into the two roles, co-researchers were spread across a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum were those who identified strongly with "nurturing parent", who had similarly emphasised the building psychological safety and relationships aspects of team coaching and some discomfort in challenging individuals in a group setting. In the middle were those who recognised that they could be pulled into both "nurturing parent" and "critical parent", depending on the situation and particular triggers. At the other end of the spectrum were those who only identified with "critical parent". It was notable that the latter group had identified with some of the stronger forms of challenge.

Whilst some aspects of "nurturing parent" were regarded as beneficial, "critical parent" was always presented in a negative light. An example of being triggered by team members' behaviour and reacting in a way, which the team coach then regretted, was provided by Joy. Reflecting on a very challenging session Joy wrote:

In the large group the three girls formed a clique and were very vocal with personal agendas. I had to shut them down at one point as it was going very off-topic, which made them sulk like school kids! I went into parent role and got sulky child reaction.

Most of the examples of co-researchers being drawn into "nurturing" or "critical" parent roles were taken from reflective logs rather than interviews. This would suggest that these dynamics of transference and countertransference are not generally in the conscious awareness of the team coach and that engaging in reflective practice and supervision is important for enabling the team coach to notice how their work is affecting them, as well as any patterns they are falling into.

Evaluation

This final phase of team coaching encompasses a number of themes including: what is team coaching and how do I know I'm doing it? The cost of "holding the team" and restoration and self-care including supervision.

What is team coaching and how do I know I'm doing it?

The co-researchers in this study were all highly experienced and qualified individual coaches. Several described their team coaching practice as "emergent", built on their dyadic coaching philosophy, experience of working with groups and teams as well as knowledge from any team coaching development undertaken. All recognised team coaching as a discrete process, whilst acknowledging somewhat "fuzzy" boundaries between it and other team interventions. When evaluating what exactly team coaching was it often appeared easier to describe what it was not. Similar expressions were used including any intervention seen as a "team building", just getting team members together to have a "nice day" or "fun" and work with just a "short-term focus".

Whilst there was convergence on the kinds of activities that were not team coaching there was also divergence. Some team coaches routinely work with a team on their team charter, vision, purpose and use psychometrics to provide a common language and understanding for the team and often a starting point for the work. Others argued that the use of tools and techniques could result in the work focussing too much on process. Bob was particularly vocal on this point;

…trying facilitation to get to a vision statement or run stuff on Myers Briggs or lots of diagnostics or psychometrics. Less of a focus on how a team is performing. It is too overly focused on task as opposed to teamwork in terms of dynamics and calling out what's in the room. They're just doing chunks of work … team charter, mission statement …

Other co-researchers emphasised this importance of being "fluid" and working with what is emerging for the team rather than a fixed agenda whilst also seeing some value in introducing theory and models. For Anita;

I feel I'm team coaching when we're sitting around talking about stuff that's emerging as important for them in that moment and supporting them and having a deeper conversation around the challenges they are having. Sometimes I might throw in a model to frame it if I think it's useful…. When anything is being used to facilitate the conversation, that for me is coaching.

What emerged from the study is that there were quite different perceptions of what team coaching is. What was evident, however, is that co-researchers were generally quite clear about what constituted team coaching *for them* and also knew when they were straying or being drawn into something that they did not recognise as team coaching.

The cost of "holding the team"

Team coaches invariably experience team coaching as more physically and mentally demanding than individual coaching and of evoking a broader range of emotional responses. Co-researchers shared moments of real pride and joy when they had witnessed behavioural changes in team members. However, they also described at least as many occasions of self-doubt and how it can be easy to take on the mantle of the weight and pressures of the team. Liza summed up the impact of team versus one-to-one coaching.

I find with team coaching there's so much going on, so many dynamics. I always go away thinking, "did I do the right thing there?" I probably leave team coaching with more questions about how I behaved than I do in one-to-one sessions. Even with my trickiest one-to-one client, I don't go away and think about it as much as with my coaching teams.

The analogy of "holding" the team was repeatedly used. For some "holding" was predominantly a mental activity, made more challenging by the numbers of individuals involved.

When they're all together it's like, how do you hold all of that? Whereas with one-to-one it's a lot simpler (Jen).

For others "holding" what is going on for all individuals in the team is described in both mental and physical terms.

It's like in modern dance, they have a sock, or very thick tights, and there are two or three people inside it and you can see an arm pushing out or a head or a leg and it's almost like that's how a team is… they're constantly moving and grappling… (Kennedy).

At its most challenging the process of "holding" can be draining. Writing in her reflective log at the end of two days team coaching Joy provides such an insight.

I was knackered at this point, and not picking up on all the clues so I took a back seat and observed whilst C facilitated. Draining holding all the energies in two days with 17 people.

Restoration and taking care of self, including supervision

Many of the self-care practices shared by co-researchers had their origin in the 'Preparation' phase of team coaching namely: sharing the load by working with a co team coach; getting insight from all team members, as well as stakeholders where possible; appreciating that the work is demanding and planning sessions as half rather than full days.

The importance of supervision as external support for team coaches emerged as a growing consideration for co-researchers as the study progressed. Responses polarised on this topic with some partaking in regular supervision as part of a particular conceptualisation of team coaching and others currently not taking their team coaching to supervision whilst others were utilising ad hoc arrangements or adapting current practices. This spectrum is displayed in figure 3.

Figure 3: Accessing team coaching supervision
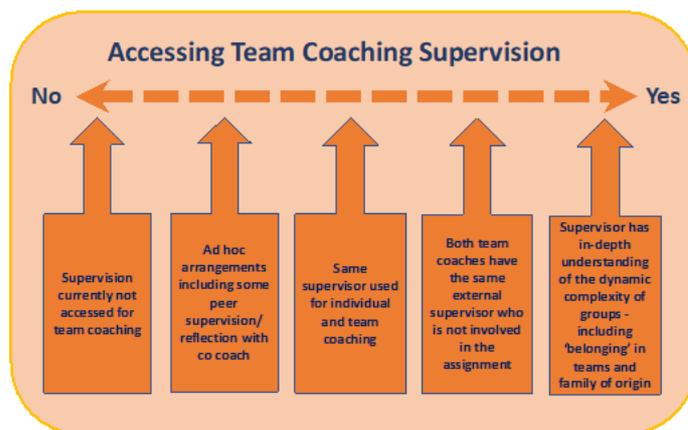
Co-researchers frequently described their team coaching practice as "emergent" or in its "infancy" and, extending this metaphor, it could be argued that team coaching supervision is "embryonic".

A common practice is for team coaches to use the same supervisor for their dyadic and team coaching practices. Several co-researchers shared how they used the same supervisor for individual and team coaching, occasionally as part of a conscious decision that the supervisor had the experience and knowledge to support both. However, for most this had not been a conscious choice and driven mainly by the fact that it was all "coaching" work and they had started to incorporate team coaching work into existing supervision arrangements. John exemplified this approach.

I have the same supervisor for the whole thing and I'm quite comfortable dealing with the same person and she seems comfortable with it.

A small number of co-researchers had separate team coaching supervision arrangements. An example would be Liza who described how the methodology she was trained in and followed stipulates that both team coaches share a supervisor who was not involved in the team coaching assignment. Advocating this approach Liza argued that, whilst peer reflection with a co team coach was useful, it was not enough.

I feel quite strongly that there should be an external supervisor involved in that … otherwise you're both colluding about what a brilliant job you do!

As the study progressed it was evident that co-researchers were becoming increasingly aware of the importance of supervision in supporting their team coaching practice. In the orientation focus group there was no mention of supervision and only two references to it in the interviews and reflective logs. By contrast the role of supervision had emerged as a core theme by the time of the creative synthesis and validation focus groups with rich discussions amongst co-researchers on the form this should take, the types of dilemmas team coaches might take to supervision and the background of the supervisor.

Discussion

There are a number of important findings from the study which provide a theoretical contribution to the process of team coaching. Some of these findings challenge concepts in the existing literature whilst others add to existing knowledge by contributing empirical insight as well as opening up new areas for debate.

In particular the study challenges strong arguments in the literature that team coaching suffers from "conceptual confusion" (Brown and Grant, 2010 p. 36) and a "foundational lack of clarity" (O'Connor and Cavanagh, 2017 p. 487). The study supports Clutterbuck et al's (2019) argument that team coaching is complex but found that there was minimal confusion. Co-researchers were quite clear about when they were engaging in team coaching and when they were engaging in some other team or group intervention. These conceptualisations contained some similarities as well as dimensions where there were distinct differences.

The study also challenges the notions of a "best time" and team readiness" for coaching (Hackman and Wageman 2005; Clutterbuck 2007; Hawkins 2011; Peters and Carr, 2013; Wageman and Lowe 2019), presenting these as largely illusionary and aspirational concepts. Instead, the study shows that team coaching can happen at any time and all team members do not need to be onboard at the outset for the work to be a success. However, the team leader is key – they need to be in place at the start, supporting the assignment and provided with extra care and attention throughout the work.

in search of universality of experience of team coaching the study identified some elements seen as common. It is a process that takes place over a number of sessions, spread out over a period of time; it involves individuals in a team learning together whilst completing a task/carrying out their business; it is holistic focussing on the whole team; it involves work that necessitates the use of a coach (it is not simply team building); it focusses on the health of the team and long-term change and utilises the behaviours and skills of dyadic coaching.

Whilst co-researchers' opinions all converged on the above elements, there was significant divergence on other aspects of team coaching, in particular relating to how team coaching is

delivered. A useful framing for understanding these differences is that they can be seen to fall into three different types of divergence:

- Theoretical/philosophical perspectives underpinning coaches' approaches with some traditions minimising the role of the coach's personal engagement (for example person-centred) whilst others favour interventions heightening awareness of the here-and-now (for example gestalt) (Cox et al, 2014).
- Psychological differences, particularly relating to preferences for favouring a planned or more fluid approach (Clutterbuck et al, 2017; Lawrence and Whyte, 2017).and how co-researchers described themselves in relation to their practice. For example, "I'm provocative" or "I'm not a challenging coach". The style of delivery of team coaching would appear to vary dependent on the psychological preferences of the team coach. This is consistent with research in both dyadic coaching and counselling (Baron and Morin, 2009; De Haan and Gannon, 2017).
- Differences in team coaching CPD. Additional team coaching CPD appears to provide a greater recognition of the ethical issues and complexity surrounding team coaching but not necessarily ready solutions and the emergence of more effective team coaches.

The PiE Team Coaching Model®

As I drew the study to a close I created my own creative synthesis of team coaching, bringing together all of the elements that I had identified in the team coaching framework into a total visual experience, showing patterns and relationships. The resulting PiE Team Coaching Model® in figure 4 is both a creative synthesis and team coaching model, building upon the findings from the research that team coaching comprises three stages: Preparation, Intervention and Evaluation. Supervision is shown as running throughout an assignment with different foci of attention in each phase.

Figure 4: The PiE Team Coaching Model®
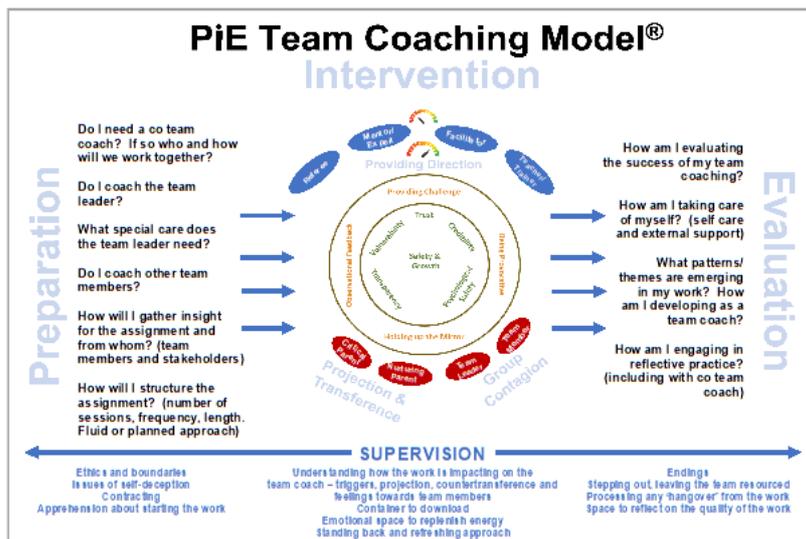
The left-hand side of the model represents the 'Preparation' phase with the key questions the coach needs to have informed answers to prior to commencing a team coaching assignment. At the core of the model is the 'Intervention' phase where a container of safety and growth is created complemented by challenge in order for learning and change to take place. During this phase the team coach may assume a variety of roles, some by choice and some that they are unconsciously drawn through projection and transference (Thornton, 2019) and "group contagion" (Cox and Patrick, 2012), and these roles are represented in the model. Finally, the 'Evaluation' phase is the time for the team coach to take stock, evaluate the work that they have undertaken on behalf of the

client as well as understand what they are taking away from the work and bringing the assignment to a clear ending.

The PiE Team Coaching Model® differs from other team coaching models and frameworks, being developed through a collaborative research process in conjunction with other practising team coaches. It reflects the complexity of team coaching interventions by encapsulating the messiness of theory. The model recognises the universal elements of team coaching as well as the fact that there are many divergences in practice.

Future Research

Team coaching research is still very much in its infancy, particularly when compared to its more mature sibling, dyadic coaching. There is, therefore, plenty of fertile ground for future researchers to take the knowledge generated from this study and build upon it.

A number of key findings are identified which would benefit from additional research. One such finding is that the philosophical/theoretical perspective of the team coach is an important influence on how team coaches deliver team coaching. A further line of enquiry suggested by this finding is whether the experience of team coaching participants is different where there are different underlying philosophies of coaching, for example gestalt, person-centred or systemic and, if so, in what ways.

The importance of self-care and specialised supervision and appreciation of projection, transference and countertransference were themes that arose and became increasingly important during the study. The findings highlight that this is an area in need of significantly more focus and understanding. The study suggests that team coaching can gain valuable insight from more established neighbouring disciplines including, in particular, group psychotherapy. Useful research could include how supervisory practices employed in group psychotherapy can enhance and inform team coaching supervision or how learning from group psychotherapy supervision can add value for team coaching supervision from the perspectives of team coaching supervisees and/or supervisors.

The above suggestions for further research predominantly relate to additional qualitative studies. There is, however, particular scope to build upon this research by taking the essential elements identified in the PiE Team Coaching Model® and Framework and testing these through a quantitative study. Such a study would enable a larger sample of practising team coaches to rate the importance of each element which would provide a more complete and nuanced picture of the essential elements ranked in order of significance.

Conclusion

The study set out to provide understanding of the experience of team coaching from the subjective perspective of team coaches – a perspective that was lacking in the existing literature. The study goes some way towards providing this missing perspective by providing rich insight from the various voices of the co-researchers as well as through my interpretative process and conceptualisation of findings.

The demands of team coaching versus dyadic coaching and the emerging understanding of the importance of regular supervision with someone who understands the complexity of working with groups are highlighted. This insight has particular significance for coach supervisors whose focus is currently on dyadic coaching practice and who may need to review their practice and/or undertake additional CPD in order to provide effective supervisory support to team coaches.

There are a number of stakeholders who can benefit from the study. The PiE team coaching model and framework provide a practical resource for coach practitioners, both those already practising team coaching as well as those currently engaging in dyadic coaching to utilise as a bridge into team coaching. The findings also provide a contribution to the coaching professional bodies and those engaged in educating and training team coaches by providing insight into what needs to be on the curriculum for coaching development programmes and accreditation. The PiE Team Coaching Model□ comprises of a blend of universal elements alongside typical variations with its central tenet that there are many different ways to do a good job.

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About the authors

Dr Gillian Graves is an executive coach, coach supervisor and team coach with over 20 years of international coaching experience in both the private and public sectors. Gillian has an MA in Coaching and Mentoring (Oxford Brookes), an MBA (Warwick University) and is a Doctor of Coaching and Mentoring (Oxford Brookes)