

COACHING – A NEW EXCITING PERSPECTIVE

Introductory admission

Let me start by openly admitting that this short article is definitely not a scholarly attempt to delve into the depths of coaching theory and engage in great academic discourse. It is simply my attempt to provide some hopefully useful, probably challenging and ideally thought-provoking perspectives on the rapidly evolving world of professional coaching. The article is based on what I've learned from all the individuals and teams I've coached over decades, the knowledge and insights gained from various professional qualifications, the profound learning from wonderful fellow professionals, my development journey as master action learning coach and my maverick mindset.



What is coaching really about?

Understanding the true nature of coaching is an obvious place to start. The International Coach Federation (ICF), defines coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential." A critical concept is that coaching recognises the individual as the expert in their life and work and believes that every person is creative, resourceful, and whole. From this foundation the coach's role is to discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve.

In summary, coaching is about partnering with people to achieve in 3 critical domains:

1. Overcoming challenges or limitations
2. Developing their full potential and
3. Achieving important goals

Let's also recognise and celebrate the immense and profound contribution coaching has made over the centuries - and especially in more recent times - in helping people from all walks of life to overcome great challenges, develop amazing capabilities and achieve exceptional outcomes. This article considers coaching largely in the professional and personal development context and not in the sporting and other domains.

Individual and team coaching

Coaching started off predominantly as *Individual* coaching and has grown phenomenally as individuals and organisations realised its immense value in an increasingly turbulent and challenging world. Not surprisingly, it has evolved extremely fast into the domain of team coaching. While individual coaching obviously focuses on individual change, team coaching is about the team creating collective change. So rather than individuals improving their skills and social awareness to achieve their own goals, teams are coached to work together to

achieve a shared goal. Team coaching is more complex than individual coaching but likely to have a bigger impact.

However, I believe this definition of team coaching is incomplete and misses a fundamental and critically important dimension.

Who coaches who?

The traditional definitions of individual and team coaching offered above are based on the principle that an individual coach partners with another individual or a team to achieve the desired outcomes offered by the coaching intervention.



However, this traditional and limiting approach raises the question of why small teams can't coach individuals and / or coach themselves or other teams?

I sincerely believe that the definition of team coaching must include teams coaching individuals and other teams. This has been one of my most profound learnings from the domain of action learning and my years as a master action learning coach.

What value does teams coaching individuals bring?

In my fairly extensive experience with all types of coaching, the practice of teams coaching individuals (or other teams) offers a broad range of potential benefits which include and are not limited to the following:

✓ Better questions

While coaching obviously requires a broad range of essential skills, I believe the most critical coaching skill is asking great empowering questions. As an individual coach I am as effective as the quality of questions I ask my client. While I'd like to believe I'm a great coach, the reality is that when I've engaged team coaching, the team invariably comes up with amazing questions that help the client in profound ways that my questions would possibly have missed.

✓ Greater diversity

Different team members will see the "coachee's" issue from many different perspectives. This obviously results in far greater diversity in the questions raised and potential insights gained by the individual. Diversity of thinking is generally regarded as an extremely powerful method of gaining insights and creating solutions.

✓ Improved solutions

I have often observed individuals asking team members to share their experiences in similar situations or specific views on the issues under resolution, with exceptionally good action steps being generated by the

person to resolve the issue. Frequently these action steps are vastly superior to what any individual coach might have facilitated as solutions often build on each other.

✓ More learning

Individuals (and team members in many cases) report profound learning from the questioning, interaction, input and reflections gained from the team coaching experience. As a coach this is a wonderful experience to observe.

When to use teams coaching individuals?

There are a number of prerequisites for coaches making the transition to this form of coaching and it is not appropriate for all situations. Some of the requirements are summarised below:

✓ Coach mindset

The coach must have the appropriate growth mindset to recognise the value of the approach, to trust the potential contribution team members and the process can make, to let go of the belief that only coaches can coach and to be flexible enough to try and learn something very different.

✓ The right individual challenge

The approach, in the early stages, works best when the individual has a real, urgent and important problem they need to resolve, that is not of a potentially very sensitive or personal nature. I have however personally found that once teams are experienced in the process, amazing results are achieved even for sensitive problems.

✓ Team training

It is essential that the team receives basic training in the appropriate team coaching / action learning process to ensure success. My experience is that this can be very effectively provided in approximately one hour. We typically have an experienced coach facilitate sessions before the team can become self-regulating. If the nature of the situation is such that different individuals and different teams are not normally solving problems, an experienced coach is obviously desirable to facilitate the process.

What is the corporate application?

Teams coaching individuals or other teams has enormous application in organisational problem-solving. Creative and effective problem-solving is obviously one of the greatest challenges organisations currently face.

The World Institute for Action Learning has pioneered the extremely effective "WIAL Action Learning" process to deliver exceptional problem-solving and simultaneous individual, team and organisation capability development.

On a personal note

I work extensively in various forms of leadership development and coaching plays an essential role in most assignments I do. When working with groups of leaders I use the team coaching process covered in this article extensively, with great outcomes. I have reduced my individual “one-on-one” coaching by at least 60% with improved results. On major organisation development projects, I use the WIAL Action Learning process extensively for problem-solving and capability development.

I wish you well in your coaching journey and would be delighted to address any questions you may wish to raise. I can be contacted on email at ron@wial.in.

Ron McLuckie / August 2021