

TEAM COACHING INSIGHT:
Creating high performing teams



Creating high performing teams

It just so happens that this has been written at a time of turmoil for society and organisations alike. The pandemic has turned normal life on its head and made every-day work interactions difficult or even impossible.

However, it has given people a very clear and unifying challenge that has focused attention and driven real collaboration and innovation. Arguably, people's ways of working and team behaviours have become more effective than what has gone before.

The world, however, doesn't need to be in turmoil to have a culture where clarity and unity of purpose, collaboration and innovation are the norm. These outcomes are the central aims of Team Coaching and this series of papers reveal how to achieve them.

We hope that these papers will help Executive, Project and other team leaders to develop their own high performing teams, and to come out of this crisis stronger.

Team Coaching – Part 1: Overview

This is the first of a series of five white papers we shall be publishing over the next few months. They draw on our 30+ years practice and research helping leaders and teams within organisations.

It should be clear reading these that our approach to Team Coaching is driven primarily by improving results through performance. The aim of Team Coaching is a high performing team. Our clients report excellent return on investment, and in some cases have saved years of time, and millions of pounds.

You can see examples in our case studies for [LLWR PCM \(Plutonium Contaminated Materials programme\)](#) and [Sellafield SMF \(Silos Maintenance Facility\)](#), and many more on our website www.acorncoaching.com

This paper is an overview of the territory, including Acorn's Team Coaching premise. The following papers will explore key areas in more detail, highlighting some nuanced yet common misconceptions.

In senior leadership, "No single leader can any longer meet the demands placed on them and there is a growing recognition of the need for highly effective leadership teams." (Peter Hawkins.)

Whilst the benefits of coaching the individual are well established, a high performing team is much more than the sum of its parts. It is not surprising therefore that organisational and team leaders are seeking to make their teams as effective as possible.

Disruptive external change (think Uber, Covid-19), means that planning as if the future is predictable is not enough. Organisations need to prepare for a range of future scenarios to make themselves more robust and resilient. Not only does the top team need to run the organisation, they need to transform it too.

Agility – *the ability to rapidly respond to emergent opportunity/threat* – has become the new must have. What unites those that have a successful track record is the certain belief in the mission, and the strengths, collaboration and leadership of a high performing team.

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Team Coaching Process

Commissioning Team Coaching is typically triggered by a concern about performance or a challenge out-with the normal.

The Leadership team and selected wider team members, across all contributors, and some external stakeholders are given a diagnostic questionnaire to enable clarity of issues and interventions. Their replies are un-attributable to allow honesty.

This data is interrogated with further in-depth interviews with selected members. The resultant full diagnosis is used with the leader/team to agree the desired outcomes and parameters for the Team Coaching interventions.

The outcomes and diagnostic results are presented into Team Coaching workshops as challenges. The Team Coach provides a structured and facilitated forum, free from everyday distractions in which participants work with each other on those challenges, within the context of Acorn's 'Team Dimensions Model'. At all times, we are helping the team to develop its own process for learning.

This last point is critical for improved performance as well as resilience, and adaptability. Whilst the team is initially dependent on the coaching and facilitation from a third party, ultimately it must develop its own capability and fluency with the learning process. The team must expect setback, mistakes, and consolidation, for it is an effortful and mindful process.

When learning is well established and embedded, the team or individuals learn both formally and informally, and creativity and innovation flourish. Reviewing and learning is fundamental, frequent and iterative within high performing teams.

Who is team coaching for?

Team coaching helps both new and established teams. All sorts of teams benefit including project, virtual, newly formed work group and executive. We coach in conjunction with the team leader, enabling them to improve the effectiveness of the team as well as enabling the members to improve their own performance.

The Acorn 'Team Dimensions' Model

This is distilled from West's 'Effective Teamwork' and is built on five key dimensions of observable actions and behaviours that characterise high performing successful teams.

All the dimensions are interdependent. As indicated above, gaining effective expertise in any of these dimensions is critically dependent on the team's ability to review, explore, challenge, support and adapt, which is why it sits at the heart of the model.

This is characterised by frequent formal sessions and informal opportunities in which the team review and modify task and social processes, signal new challenges, call out ineffectiveness, celebrate progress, offer expertise and experience, with everyone engaged in making improvements.

Whilst all of the dimensions are important to success, there is also a hierarchy that needs to be understood. It is the Primary purpose that brings each team into being and makes each team unique. Any lack of clarity, or shared understanding of the primary purpose is a serious threat.

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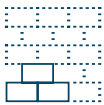
The Acorn Team Coaching Model (continued)

The **Primary Purpose** of the team provides a clear, appropriate and unifying direction which is carefully translated into a small number of well-defined objectives. All team members understand the team's purpose, their own contribution and interdependencies. The Primary Purpose, when fully implemented, will impact the wider organisation and its stakeholders, therefore the Primary Purpose must be kept up to date with relevant feedback.



Team Leadership – the team leader exercises a major influence on the task focus and the culture and emotional climate of the team through their inspirational approach and modelling, thus impacting on overall team performance. The leader needs to transition from creating clarity and certainty about the Primary Purpose to delegating with appropriate autonomy to ensure team members are fully empowered to formulate, decide and implement change to improve their output.

The team leader must ensure buy-in to the Primary Purpose and ethos of the team by overcoming natural fears and conflicts arising out of new ways of working, and if necessary, by removing any persistent blockers.



Structure – this section focuses upon the way in which the team organises itself and acts in order to deliver its purpose and objectives effectively. For example, roles and responsibilities and meeting structure; ensuring there is enough and suitable challenge in the task, in the roles, and in the stage objectives.

A sure sign of success is the free contribution of information without fear of blame or gamesmanship. Constructive conflict is managed effectively through the learning process.



Team Members – this section focuses upon the ongoing recruitment, engagement and development of team members, to ensure their skills, actions and behaviours contribute to the Primary Purpose.

Clarity of roles, skills and experience needed for the job is important as is the opportunity for individuals to gain new skills that are required by the work.

Diversity of skill, experience and culture can enhance creativity, but too much can create instability. Cognitive and emotional intelligence increase a team's capacity for high performance. Members need to model desired behaviours and culture.



Impact – this section focuses upon the two-way process of learning from, and positively influencing, the wider organisation and its key stakeholders. We must not forget that the true value of the team's work will be realised by the Stakeholders.

Stakeholder value analysis is therefore a core part of the team's frequent review of its work and crucially influences the Primary Purpose.

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PRIMARY PURPOSE

- Defining a clear/unifying team purpose
- Differentiated collaborative objectives
- Clarifying team expectations: tasks, team behaviours, reflective practice

TEAM LEADERSHIP

- Maintaining focus on Primary Purpose (discernment)
- Inspirational leadership
- Creating the conditions for team success
- Emphasis's reflection
- Models: positive exchange, active listening, learning, appreciation, respect

STRUCTURE

- Shared: terminology, practices, norms
- Clarity of roles and interdependencies
- Meeting structures
- Measurement of performance against objectives
- Decision making process
- Review/reflecting structure

TEAM MEMBERS

- Collective and committed input/responsibility for the team and its development
- Awareness/acceptance of others values and diversity
- Selflessness vs individualism
- Emotional awareness of self/others
- Conflict management skills
- Demonstrate: appreciation, empathy, respect

IMPACT

- Focused on the external environment
- Embracing stakeholders
- Maintain integrity/unity of the team
- Willingness to be flexible, learn and develop (humility)

Creating high performing teams

How can you help your team towards high performance?

Clearly it is beneficial for team leaders and team members to develop their personal knowledge, skill and behaviour in line with those required within high performing teams. However, the most impactful training interventions are conducted in the live environment where the individuals act in conjunction with each other to conduct the team's work.

This is where high performance needs to occur.

The training interventions need to be tailored directly to a specific team, with a specific objective firmly linked to the Primary Purpose. It needs to occur at appropriate junctures in the work of the team. It also needs to allow focused attention away from the day to day operational interruptions, with enough time to explore the relevant issues thoroughly.

And finally, the learning from the training intervention needs to be embedded in the team's everyday process and culture.

Over many years of practical application, Acorn has distilled its Team Coaching approach and Team Dimensions Model into an effective and efficient development tool to help teams and team leaders develop high performance. Our clients testify to the benefits.

The next paper in this series will delve deeper into the indispensable contributions to success of the Primary Purpose and Leadership, with further insights on the remaining sections to follow.

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COACHING & DEVELOPMENT

If you would like to find out more about Acorn, our people and how we can help develop and improve the performance of individuals and teams in your organisation, then we'd love to hear from you.

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