06

Coaching the five disciplines: systemic team coaching

Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence wins championships.
(MICHAEL JORDAN, QUOTED IN KETS DE VRIES)

I was called in to coach the executive team of one of the largest government departments in the UK, which had 130,000 staff and four main business units. The request had come about because their capability review had indicated that the collective leadership of the top team was not rated highly. The team, with internal support, had already done good work on leadership team behaviours and in improving the efficiency of their weekly meetings. In contracting with the team members individually I found different views about what needed to change and how team coaching might help. I met with them all together to contract the differences that were needed, and they came to a consensus that as team coach I should sit in on their meetings and offer process reflections. My initial experiences told me that such reflections would be listened to politely with odd bits of defensive response and would have very little impact. I realized I had to find a new form of contract.

Introduction

In the previous chapter we explored the stages in the relationship between the team coach and the team he or she is coaching. This chapter will focus on how the team coach can coach the five disciplines outlined in Chapter 3 and also coach the connecting dialogues and flows between the disciplines. This requires the coach to focus on the multiple relationships of the team, both the internal relationship among team members and the external relationship between the team as a whole and their commissioners, stakeholders and their future.

This chapter is at the heart of the book, for it focuses on the difference between most of the traditional approaches to team coaching, team development and my own approach, 'systemic team coaching'. In Chapter 1, I looked at some of the major growing challenges facing senior leadership teams that call for new approaches to team coaching, and in Chapter 4, I defined systemic team coaching as follows:

> Systemic team coaching is a process by which a team coach works with a whole team, both when they are together and when they are apart, in order to help them improve both their effectiveness and how they work together, and also how they develop their collective leadership to more effectively engage and co-create value with and for all their key stakeholder groups to jointly transform the wider business ecosystem and create beneficial for the wider ecology.

Each of the five disciplines is essential for a team to be sustainably effective and value creating. Let me illustrate this by showing what you notice when one of the disciplines is missing:

- *If you ignore commissioning*: you will try to develop the team in a vacuum, there will be a lack of clear direction, non-alignment of effort, and they may get better and better at doing what is not valued by their stakeholders.
- *If you ignore clarifying*: the team will have no collective ownership of the direction or focus – and be chasing externally set targets with competing priorities and unclear roles.
- *If you ignore co-creating*: the team will know what work needs to be done, but not how they need to connect with each other to do it. There will be a lot of task-driven activity, long meetings with agreements that do not get followed through, a good deal of blame and conflict and little fun or enjoyment or collective energy.
- *If you ignore connecting:* the team will have internal clarity, connection and energy, but this will be very inwardly focused. There will be an absence of partnering beyond the team, with each team member trying to meet the demands of their own stakeholders, with a customer–supplier mentality. The team will not be able to connect or stay abreast of changing stakeholder needs.
- *If you ignore core learning*: the team will repeat unsuccessful stuck patterns, and fail to learn from its failures. There will be little innovation in team

processes or meetings, and dependency on the team leader or team coach. The team may get better and better at efficiently managing today but fail to build the capacity that will be needed for succeeding in the future.

When contracting with the senior civil service team, I was faced with a conundrum: telling my new clients they were asking for the wrong thing was not going to be a good way of starting my coaching relationship, but just acquiescing to the requests of the team consensus would have frustrated many of the individual team members and added only limited value. In supervision, I realized that I was probably already experiencing 'parallel process', as from my individual interviews I realized that many team members also experienced the strong pull to compromise to achieve consensus, meaning that conflict was avoided but progress was slow. This is a classic coach dilemma: to be directive or to be non-directive were both unhelpful options. A third way that transcended this either–or dilemma had to be found.

I decided on an inquiry approach that provided the team with a reframing of the lens through which they were viewing both team coaching and their own leadership team role. I took an amended version of the five disciplines model of systemic team coaching (see Figure 6.1) and asked them to score their collective performance in each of the four disciplines. I collected their scores, averaged them for each domain and fed back the collective picture (see Figure 6.2).

FIGURE 6.1 The Four Quadrants

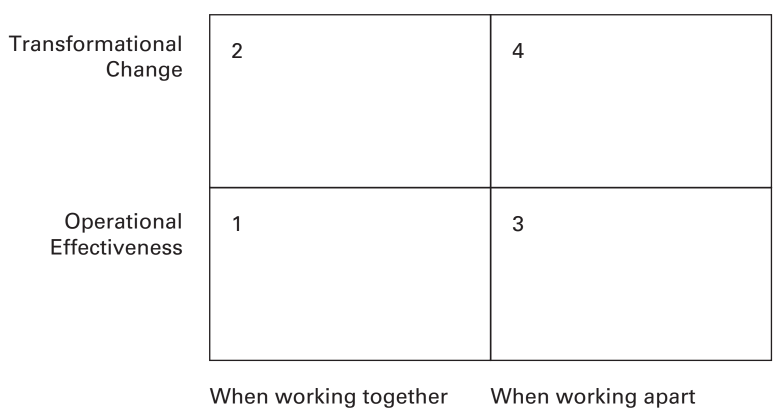


FIGURE 6.2 Team scores for the Four Quadrants

	When working together	When working apart
Transformational Change	2 **5.3**	4 **3.8**
Operational Effectiveness	1 **6.9**	3 **5.2**

I asked them where they thought I could most help them. It was clear that I could spend the next year just helping them raise their Discipline 1 score from 6.9 to 7.9, but that would not be the best use of taxpayers' money or their investment in time. The Permanent Secretary, who was the CEO, jumped out of his chair, went to the flipchart and said it was clear they most needed help in transforming the department, particularly when they were not together, but said: 'How could I possibly do that?' I replied: 'I have no idea, but it looks like that is what we need to work out together.' This led to a more complex contracting discussion about how I could help them in all four boxes of the grid. Their assumption had been that I would sit in on their executive meetings and provide reflective feedback. Instead, we had to co-design a coaching process and programme where I could coach them live alongside each of their key collective activities.

The five disciplines of systemic team coaching

In Chapter 3, I introduced this model as the five key disciplines that value-creating leadership teams need to practise (see Figure 3.1 p 51). This chapter will show how the systemic team coach can support and develop the team in each of these disciplines, with illustrations from a wide range of leadership team coaching relationships.

Discipline 1: Commissioning and re-commissioning

When I carried out research on leadership challenges in the Civil Service, a number of those interviewed commented on how 'the real leadership challenge lies at the interface between the politicians and the senior civil servants'.

In coaching a leadership team in a government department, it is essential to attend to the political–Civil Service relationship. As part of my coaching of the leadership team I arranged to meet the Secretary of State and junior ministers to ascertain:

- what they appreciated about the leadership team and how the leadership team were transforming the department;
- what they wanted to come out of the transformation process;
- what they wanted different about the way the transformation was being carried out;
- how they thought the leadership team could be more effective;
- how they thought the relationship between them and the leadership team could be improved.

This produced some useful feedback. As coach, I had to decide how to feed this back to the team, knowing from experience that just to deliver the feedback cold would create both resistance and defensiveness. I decided that I first had to awaken their active interest and curiosity. I asked them to imagine what the ministers had said, and also to list the questions they would like to have answered through listening to the feedback. As the team coach I was then able to use their answers to tailor the feedback to avoid repeating what they already knew and to address the issues they wanted to understand. This created a sense of dialogue across the boundary and avoided the one-way telling so common in the Civil Service. This in turn provided a basis for the team to explore how they wanted to change their relationship with their commissioners.

Another way of coaching the co-missioning discipline is to work with the board and the leadership team in a joint meeting. When I consulted for the merger of Outspan and Unifruco (Cape Fruit) in South Africa to form Capespan, we held joint team workshops for the board and senior executive teams of the newly merged company to create their new purpose, strategy, values and vision. This ensured a great diversity of perspectives from executives and non-executives from both legacy companies, and included board members who were fruit growers and therefore suppliers, executives who ran the core business in South Africa and those who ran the international marketing entities. This wider attendance ensured fuller ownership of the outcomes. However, the challenge of such an event is that we had over 30 people in the room and a great deal of politics and mistrust!

The difference between purpose, mission and vision

I spent a lot of time in the late 20th century helping leadership teams and organizations develop their mission and vision statements. It often focused on 'What we want to achieve in the world'; 'Our success'; 'How we can be number one in our sector'. It took me a while to recognize that the term 'mission' comes originally from military warfare – our plan to defeat the enemy, capture a strategic location, a battle plan. Explorers like Columbus, Francis Drake and Captain Cook also had missions to find, claim and occupy new territory – missions that led to colonization. It also has religious evangelism connotations – 'going out to convert the natives' – forms of cultural colonization. Companies too can get focused on winning new market segments – colonizing sectors.

There was also a lot of confusion in terminology, with people using the terms mission, vision, strategy in almost interchangeable ways.

As we have moved into the 21st century there has been a gradual but strengthening move away from mission statements and growing focus on company purpose. This paralleled the move beyond just focusing on maximizing short-term shareholder returns to creating 'shared value' for all the key stakeholder segments the company is here to serve (Porter and Kramer, 2011). The focus is moving from an ego-centric inside-out approach, to a more ecosystem, outside-in approach.

In 2018 I wrote: 'A mission captures the company's ambition, a vision shows what it will be like when success is achieved, but purpose defines who the company serves and the value it creates for them.'

A purpose is not a set of goals or targets – those are the milestones on the journey, not the reason for the journey or the destination. A purpose is built on who and what our collective work serves and the value we create for those multifarious stakeholders. It is our *raison d'etre* – our big WHY (Sinek, 2009) and it needs to speak to the head and the heart – provide meaning to the head and passion and excitement to the heart and motivate and align the team. The purpose creates the team, not the team their purpose.

The team purpose exists before a team comes into being, for it is the WHY the team is created. It is what gives birth to the team. Thus, the team cannot create its own purpose, but has to discover it. One of the questions we asked when we were helping the Royal Society of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce in 2003–2004 when they were coming up to their 250th anniversary and had become confused about their core purpose, was:

'Why was the Society started back in 1754?'

When we discovered from the answers that it was started in a coffee house in Convent Garden with an inspiring Social Change manifesto, we asked them: 'What is the Social Change manifesto that you can uniquely focus on for the 21st century?'

This led to the Coffee House Challenge, sponsored by Starbucks, where they brought together their RSA fellows with students, local politicians, business leaders, artists and innovators to develop the 21st-century manifesto around five core themes. We had helped them go back to their roots in order to then discover the new version of their purpose, both outside-in, by bringing in their stakeholders and future-back, the emergent challenges they were uniquely positioned to focus on, given that they were able to bring together many different professions, disciplines and politicians in multidisciplinary, multi-sector, politically neutral generative dialogues and co-creation. In commissioning the team discover their purpose: in clarifying the team, refine, clarify, align and take collective ownership of their purpose.

The purpose resides both in the commissioning and clarifying disciplines. In commissioning, the team engages in the inquiry process to discover more fully their purpose, and then they shape and refine that in their internal clarifying. Often, they then need to take that back to the team sponsors and some of the stakeholders to get their agreement and endorsement. This is the commissioning–clarifying dance.

Discipline 2: Clarifying

This discipline helps the team clarify its purpose, mission, strategy, collective objectives, goals and roles. Depending on what the team already have in place, the team coach can assist the team in developing or re-clarifying their team charter. This includes:

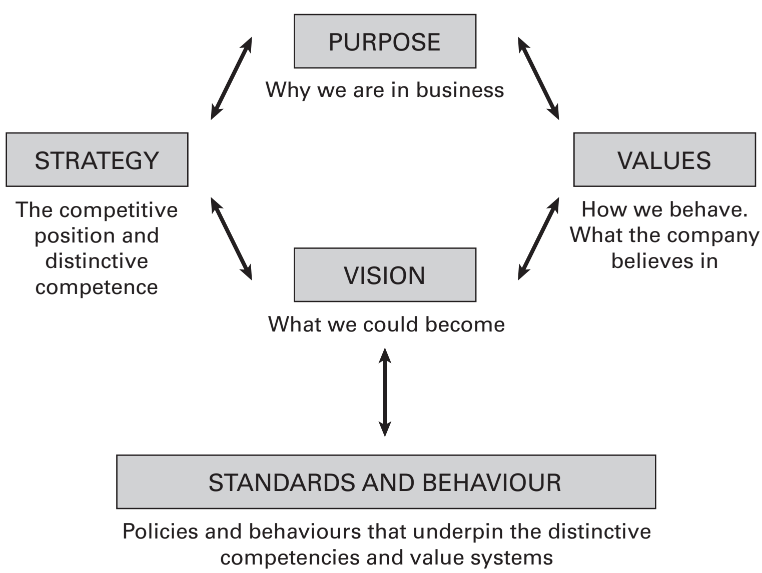
- their core purpose or collective endeavour;
- their strategy and strategic narrative;

- their transformation plan and change design;
- how the team need to meet differently for their transformation meetings from the way they meet for their operational meetings;
- key roles and accountabilities for various aspects of the transformation process.

The purpose of an organization, department or team is the overarching framework in which strategizing takes place. Our model of the organization charter, shown in Figure 6.3, is based on work by key writers in the field (Binney *et al*, 2005; Senge *et al*, 2005; Peters and Carr, 2013b).

- *Purpose* is why we are in business as a team, our *raison d'être* – the difference we wish to make in the world; Ismail (2014) shows how successful companies now go beyond simple missions statements to have a 'massive transformational purpose' of beneficial impact on the world.
- *Strategy* is what we focus on, our core markets, competencies and geographies, also our unique value propositions and how we differentiate our team's offerings both from the rest of the organization and the external competition.

FIGURE 6.3 Model of the organization charter



- *Core values* underpin the way we do business, the principles and behaviours that distinguish how we relate within the team to the wider business as well as to our customers, suppliers, investors and other stakeholders.
- *Vision* is what we could become as a team, if we were successful at fulfilling our purpose, focused on our strategy and behaving in line with our core values.

Peter Senge *et al* (1994) defined a vision as:

> a picture of a future you seek to create, described in the present tense, as if it were happening now. A statement of 'our vision' shows where we want to go, and what it will be like when we get there... The more richly detailed and visual the image is, the more compelling it will be. Because of its tangible and immediate quality, a vision gives shape and direction to the organization's future. And it helps people set goals to take the organization closer.

It is important that the team members co-create and clarify their team charter together. One way of coaching this process is to ask team members to complete the following statements by themselves in a minimum of three and maximum of five bullet points. This encourages everybody to balance brevity with specificity:

The *primary purpose* of our organization is:

- *Strategy*: to fulfil our purpose, our team needs to focus on the unique capabilities that distinguish what our team can do from the contribution of other parts of the organization. They are...
- The *core values* of our team, which should guide how we work and behave together and what we role-model in our engagement with others, are...
- *Vision*: if our team were extremely successful in achieving our purpose, carrying out our strategy and living our core values, what we would see, hear and feel in two years' time would be...

Creating the team charter with 'collective build'

The important thing about the responses that the team members generate is that they maximize the diversity of views, so that each view builds on the others and ends with a jointly created document. To maximize the 'wisdom of crowds' and minimize the danger of 'groupthink' (see Chapter 1, p 25), it is essential to start with individual thinking time, and then to avoid one person reading out his or her complete answer but rather to practise a 'collective build'. This is a process where one team member offers his or her top bullet point and then others immediately offer their statements that build on the starter statement. When this is complete, another person offers a different starting bullet point and the team repeat the process. It is often best to start with a quiet, less dominant member.

Some boards prefer the executive team to produce their own charter statement and then allow the non-executives to critically challenge and amplify what has been produced. In other settings the executive team and the board work separately on their team charter, as well as their expectations, and feed back to the other group. From these parallel explorations, a dialogue between the two groups can be facilitated that produces a third charter statement that is more than the sum of the two parts. This can also produce a good deal of learning for both groups.

Whichever method is chosen, it is important that there is a true sense of 'co-missioning' – that the direction is arrived at through some form of collective dialogue across the boundary of the team and their wider system sponsors. Too often teams work resentfully with the commission they have been given and never take full ownership of their mission, or they develop their own mission that is not aligned to the expectations of their sponsors and those to whom they are answerable.

Having arrived at a clear and agreed commission and purpose, the executive team at Capespan needed to turn this into a clear strategy, objectives and action plan. The key questions that assisted this process were:

- How are you going to fulfil your purpose in the different areas of your strategic focus, staying true to your core values and in a way that will move you towards your vision?
- What are the milestones and scorecard by which you can chart progress towards your goals?
- What are the key strategic activities that you need:
  - to own as a whole team?;
  - to allocate to small sub-groups of the team or project teams?;
  - to allocate to individual team members?
- How can the team focus on business as usual and also focus on the core activities of transforming the organization and its various divisions and departments?

It can be useful for a team also to develop a wider team charter which includes: a) agreements on how they will work together; b) their team's transformational KPIs or objectives and key results; and c) the behaviours they need and need to avoid to be successful. The wider team charter is a document in which they capture the various elements ranging from purpose, strategy, values and vision, to their team objectives, goals and KPIs, and their working agreement and required behaviours.

Discipline 3: Co-creation

Having a clear purpose and being clear about what the team needs to do to achieve that purpose, lays the foundation but becomes empty rhetoric unless it immediately translates into the team meetings and working together differently. Moussa *et al* (2016) highlight three key stages for a successful team: 1. Commit, 2. Check, and 3. Close. The commitment of all team members needs to be achieved in the first two disciplines, with the team clarifying their team charter and agreeing their team targets and ways of working. But then in this third discipline of co-creation, the team need to constantly 'check' their progress against their clarified commitments and then agree actions to 'close' the gap between the commitments and what is emerging. This can form the basis for an exploration with the team about how they need to work as a team to achieve and, if possible, surpass their key team targets. At this stage the team coach can help the team identify aspects of team dynamics and culture that either enable or block the team in performing well against their own performance objectives. If the team lack the psychological safety to explore these, or do the work of the first two disciplines, then team coaching may need to start by attending to this key aspect of the team (see the section on psychological safety below).

From the work on closing the gap, a development plan can be produced with the team which includes the development the team can do by themselves and the areas where they will receive support from the team coach. Often one of the key areas is how the team improve their meetings.

Meetings bloody meetings

This was the name of a great video I watched as a young leader in the 1970s produced by Video Arts and starring John Cleese, who acts a team leader who dreams he is in court for running boring, unproductive and energy-destroying meetings. In the many years since, I have realized that most of us as leaders should be in the dock for the same crime.

For every senior executive who tells me about what great, enjoyable and fun meetings they have, I meet a hundred who complain about boring, unproductive meetings that eat up far too much of their days. Why do so many really bright managers and leaders put up with this? David Pearl (2012), in his engaging book *Will There Be Donuts?*, advocates a meeting revolution, including blowing up non-productive meetings, making mediocre meetings worse so people wake up and do something about it, and using theatrical interruptions to break old, boring patterns.

Effective meetings are an essential foundation for becoming a high-value creating team and changing meeting structures and processes is a key part of the coaching process. Among the interventions I have found to be helpful are the following:

- *Cut the number of meetings you go to*: one senior executive I worked with sent out an email saying he would only attend meetings where the outcome they were there to create was stated up front and where the person who was calling the meeting could tell him what value he was there to add. Unsurprisingly, the percentage of his week spent in meetings decreased from 70 per cent to less than 30 per cent!
- *Make your meetings outcome focused*: many meetings are ruled by a lengthy agenda. I suggested to one chief executive I worked with that she start all meetings by agreeing with her team the top three outcomes the team needed to achieve together in their meeting, and then spending 80 per cent of the time on these items where there was real collective value creation.
- *Distinguish between three different types of activity*: information sharing, generative dialogue and decision making. Try to maximize the time spent on generative dialogue where the team have to generate collective thinking that is better than any individual could have arrived at by themselves, thus leveraging the team quotient.
- *Radically weed the agenda*: remove anything that really only involves a couple or a few members of the team and where they can have their own sub-meeting. Remove information sharing that can just as well be done by written exchange or other forms of conversation. Only keep what needs the active involvement of the whole team's hearts and minds.

- *Set the climate where people can challenge*: when Greg Dyke was Director General of the BBC, he was shocked by how many meetings he attended where no one seemed to know what they were collectively trying to achieve. He shared his experience in an address to all 10,000 staff and said that when this happened in future he was going to produce from his pocket a yellow card, just like a football referee; at this point he produced such a yellow card bearing the words: 'Cut the crap and make it happen'. In helping him design this intervention I encouraged him to then invite all staff to write in and ask for a yellow card, if they promised to use it. Hundreds responded and, once given permission and a shared language, started to challenge the meetings they attended.
- *Use time-outs*: team members get so focused on the content of meetings, either engaged with them or reacting to them, that they stop noticing what is happening in the room and the dynamics of the team (see section on time-outs, p 385).
- *Use check-ins and check-outs*: get everyone engaged at the personal level at the beginning of the meeting and everyone speaking to their take-away and commitment at the end of the meeting.
- *Clarify items brought*: every item has a front page saying:
  - why it has been brought;
  - the outcome and added value needed from the team;
  - what else it connects with;
  - the next stage in the process.
- *Bring in different stakeholder perspectives*: have a chair for the customers, the investors, the employees, future generations and the ecology, and ask people to occupy these chairs, and speak from that systemic perspective.
- *Clarify the agreements* made and how they will be communicated before you leave the meeting. If necessary, use mini-fast-forward rehearsals to practise the communication.
- *Sharpen the team saw*: regularly review what is creating value in your meetings and what isn't, and how you could increase the value the team collectively create. This doesn't have to wait until a team away-day, but can be done half-way through a meeting or after each meeting for a while. But do not make it a new boring habit.

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In Chapter 8 we will explore how these methods can be developed for virtual meetings.

Coaching the team live in their team meetings

Re-engineering the number of meetings and their structure and process is only the first step. Teams then need coaching in working the new processes and handling the emerging dynamics live in their team meetings (see Chapter 18 which has a whole section on methods for doing this).

As a process consultant the coach is there not to facilitate the meeting but to carefully listen and observe, and from time to time offer 'time-out interventions' (see Chapter 18; Schein, 2013; Nevis *et al*, 2008 and the section on the Cape Cod approach in Chapter 19).

Workshops to explore team functioning

Depending on the maturity of the team and the team dynamics, this could focus on a number of different dimensions:

- *The team culture*: every team has aspects of their culture that enable them to perform well against their performance objectives, and elements that block or hinder their performance.
- *Exploring diversity*: there are many different dimensions of diversity, from those that are part of our given identity such as race, gender, age, sexual preference, to cognitive diversity, and to psychological and role style diversity, which I will outline in Chapter 12. These can be explored in many creative ways that help the team:
  - to recognize their diversity (or lack of it);
  - start to value their diversity and what it does and could bring to the team;
  - utilize and leverage their diversity more fully.

These can be explored through dialogical inquiry and/or experientially (see Hawkins and Presswell, 2018).

- *Team performance functioning*: the 'high-value-creating team questionnaire' (see Chapter 17) can be filled in by all team members and the averaged scores and score spread fed back to the team. From this the team can decide which areas they most need to explore and improve, and what both individuals and the collective team need to commit to doing differently to improve the team's effectiveness.

- *Exploring the deeper team dynamics*: the team coach might use several approaches to help the team explore the more hidden and deeper team dynamics. These could include a floating team sculpt (see Chapter 18), small groups drawing cartoons of the team a year (or more) ago, today and how they would like it to be in a year's (or more) time, and an exploration of the culture of the team and their unwritten rules, norms and assumptions.

Whichever way a team or group decides to attend to its own dynamics, it is important to remember that the time to start focusing on what is happening in the process is when things are going well and not wait until the group or team are in crisis. When the levels of conflict, hurt and fear rise, it becomes much more difficult to see what is happening and to take the risk of making changes. However, for some teams it is only when they hit a crisis that they create the motivation to face what is happening.

With colleagues at Bath Consultancy Group and Renewal Associates I carried out research into what stops teams working as more than the sum of their parts. I found the main 'team interruptions' to be:

- *Lack of clarity of collective focus*: if a team has not clarified their collective focus, this will cause conflict in every aspect of their functioning.
- *Lack of psychological safety*: see below.
- *'Either-or' solution debates*: we have not yet discovered a team that does not have some form of repeated 'either-or' debates like:
  - Should we grow organically or by acquisition?
  - Should we centralize or decentralize?
  - Should we confront this stakeholder or maintain our good relationship?
  - Should we restructure or not?
- I developed the 'Hawkins law of either-or', which says that if you are having the same either-or debate for the third time, then you are asking the wrong question (Hawkins, 2005).

- *Accountability only occurs top-down – not across the team*: in some teams, members only speak when it is their area of expertise or function that is being discussed and otherwise 'keep their head down'. Team meetings become serial reports to the 'boss' and the team becomes a hub-and-spokes work group, with no real collective teamwork (see Chapter 13).

- *Doing to each other what others do to us*: elsewhere (Hawkins and Smith, 2013) we have termed this a 'parallel process', the unconscious re-enactment of what we have experienced being done to us by others. One large consultancy firm we worked with played havoc with its internal meetings by always changing the timings at the last minute, with participants often turning up late for each other. It took us some time before we realized that this was an unconscious re-enactment of how they allowed themselves to be treated by their clients.
- *Aiming for agreement rather than commitment*: we have witnessed many teams who have apparently made a decision that they were all going to carry out, only to find a month later that nothing had happened. We discovered that it was possible to predict when this was going to happen by taking notice of the non-verbal communication in the team meeting. The team were voting with their hands saying yes, but their bodies and tones of voice were clearly saying otherwise. As with transformational coaching (Hawkins and Smith, 2020), if the shift in commitment does not happen in the room, it is not going to happen outside it.
- *Agenda-driven rather than outcome-driven meetings*: often it can feel as if the goal of some team meetings is to complete the agenda rather than to create value.
- *Believing effective team meetings = effective team*: team meetings should enable effective teamwork during the rest of the time and not be an end in themselves. Teams are effective when they work in a joined-up way, even when they are working solo or in pairs or small groups.
- *Ignoring the 'smell of the dead elk'*: many teams have issues that affect everybody, but there is a tacit agreement that nobody should mention them. It is like a dead animal under the table that everybody can smell, but nobody wants to deal with.

After we had completed our research I came across the book by Patrick Lencioni (2002) in which he created a delightful fable of an imaginary leadership team that gets turned around by their new female CEO, using a simple model of 'The five dysfunctions of the team'. Lencioni's model (see Figure 19.1) has a great deal of overlap between my 'team interruptions' and his hierarchy of five dysfunctions, each building on the ones beneath it. This is covered in Chapter 19 when I describe other approaches to team coaching.

One of the key roles of a team coach is to interrupt these interruptions, but first the coach has to start by engaging the team in some form of mutual diagnosis of the critical areas that the team need to focus on to become more effective. This can be done by presenting them with the Hawkins list of 'team interruptions' or Lencioni's 'team dysfunctions' and ask them, possibly in small groups, to identify which they see they get trapped by, with examples.

Psychological safety

As mentioned in Chapter 4, and above, if the team lack the requisite psychological safety and trust to engage in doing the work of commissioning and clarifying effectively together, team coaching may need to start in Discipline 3 by attending to this key element.

Psychological safety is a concept that was first developed by psychologists in the 1960s and 1970s and then much later applied to groups and teams in the pioneering research by Amy Edmondson (1999 and 2014), and further updated by Edmondson and work at Google in their project Aristotle (see p 144). Kahn (1990: 708) wrote, 'Psychological safety is being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status or career.'

To engage in team coaching there has to be a requisite level of psychological safety that allows team members to contribute freely without fear of this having undue personal cost, in how they are seen, treated or judged by others. Clearly careful contracting as outlined in the previous chapter should increase psychological safety, but in certain cases other preliminary work may be necessary.

Here are four useful strategies:

1. *Psychological safety questionnaire:* David Clutterbuck and I created this questionnaire to help teams discover their psychological safety levels and explore how to increase them (see Chapter 17 p 357).
2. *Secrets exercise*: team members are asked to write or type on a piece of paper something they believe needs addressing but people avoid mentioning. These are then mixed up and reallocated and each person shares the one they have been given and speaks to it as if it was their own and the issue is discussed. This ensures issues are collectivized and people are not punished for being the messenger.

3 *Extra contractual agreements:* in certain cases, I have introduced extra contractual agreements. In one board where the company founders had fallen out with each other and each recruited their protégés to the board, the levels of mistrust were so high that I said I would only work with them if they all agreed to say that they had created a great company and also a dysfunctional board, and they were all responsible for this. Also, I contracted with them that I had permission to interrupt them the moment they started any blame statements of each other.

4 *The Lencioni Method*: one can work through the stages in the Lencioni pyramid (see Chapter 19).

Appreciative inquiry

In a more mature team it is also possible to explore the team dynamics from a more open and less problem-based focus. When working with one executive team in a large financial company, we asked the members to complete the following questions separately and then share their answers:

- The unwritten rules of this group are...
- What I most enjoy in this team is…
- I am most proud of the team because…
- What I find hard to admit about my work in this team is...
- I think what we avoid talking about here is...
- I hold back on saying...
- The hidden agendas that this group carries are...
- We are at our best when...
- What interrupts us from being at our best is...
- We are at our worst when…

This was followed by each person receiving feedback from all the other team members on what they appreciated and what they found difficult about his or her contribution to the team. Then each person had the opportunity to say what he or she most appreciated and found most difficult and wanted different about the team as a whole. This can also provide a basis for planning what the team need to stop, start and continue doing.

Another way of doing this is to use the Contribution Grid (see Chapter 17).

Designing the development in the team dynamic

Insight into the team dynamics and good intentions do not create change by itself. It is important to help the team move from insight to a committed development plan. One way this can be enabled is when the team have reviewed the outputs from all or some of the above, and they can carry out a three-way sort, deciding what they need to continue, stop and start doing differently.

THREE-WAY SORT

The team coach sets up three flipcharts, each one with a different title:

- What we need to hold on to and build on...
- What we need to stop doing...
- What we need to start doing...

The team is divided into three smaller groups and each group is asked to start on a different large sheet of paper or whiteboard. The first phase of this process is for sub-teams to brainstorm responses to the question in front of them. They put down their ideas, leaving some space between each one. After five minutes each team moves to the next board to their right.

The second phase of the process is to build on the ideas left by the previous team and make them more specific. At the second board, the rule is that nobody can cross anything out, but everybody is encouraged to make more specific what is already there and add more items. If, for example, the previous group has put ‘communication’ on their flipchart, the second group would be asked to add their responses to the question ‘communication between whom and about what’?

The third phase of the process involves the group moving on to the last board. Once again, the team members can add items that have not so far been included, but they need also to make more specific the items that are already there.

Finally, each group moves back to their original board and, having read what is there, prioritizes the issues. Alternatively, every team member can be given five stars and asked to allocate them anywhere on any of the three boards next to the priority issues that need action by the team. They can allocate the five stars against issues in any way they want. This visual voting method quickly shows up how the team see their priorities and directions for moving forward.

Discipline 4: Connecting

The focus of this discipline is on how the leadership team as a whole, as well as individually and in pairs, engages the wider stakeholder system. The first step in this process for any team is to discover who their key stakeholders are – who are the groups and systems they co-create value with and for. A high-value creating team needs to create beneficial value for all its stakeholders, not just their organization and its shareholders. The coach can help the team by coaching them through a process where they look first at the basic stakeholder segments, then work out together the key groups within each segment that are critical to their value-creation, and then the key individuals who are their links to these different groups.

The basic stakeholder segments

About 20 years ago I developed a basic stakeholder set, building on the work of the Royal Society of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce project on 'tomorrow's company', and the writings of Arie de Geus (1997) and Michael Porter (2011), who have both stressed the need for sustainable businesses to create 'shared value' for a wide range of stakeholders. These stakeholder segments are shown in Figure 6. 1.

I trialled this with many boards and executive teams and also used it in two companies where I was the non-executive chairman for my chairman's introduction to the annual report. This report showed the contribution made by each of these stakeholder segments and the added value that had been returned to them by the company.

Beyond the usual suspects

Since then I have developed two additions – the '13th fairy' and 'The seventh generation' as shown in Figure 6.2. I realized that every team and organization has stakeholders they are 'wilfully blind' to and are ignoring at their peril. The example I often give is that BP, prior to the Gulf oil disaster, did not realize that fish and fishermen on the east coast of America were critical stakeholders. The fish stocks and their habitats were destroyed, US fishermen took legal action and lobbied intensely, and this nearly brought one of the largest UK-listed companies to its knees.

Increasingly I have also become aware how most boards and executive teams are also short-term in their thinking and strategizing. This leads to decision-making that benefits the next quarter of the current year often at the cost of future communities, the wider ecology and future generations. In 2012 I shared a platform with Rainbow Hawk, a native American Elder, who spoke about how, in his tradition, leadership requires taking decisions with awareness of the seven generations that come before us, the seven generations that come after us and all living beings with whom we share this one earth. I realize how myopic and short-termist most Anglo-American traditions have become. The cost of this for our collective grandchildren and generations beyond that (if there are any!) is enormous. So the other level of inquiry every team needs to be engaged with is the needs of the seven generations that will follow us, and the legacy the team would be proud to gift to them. Roman Krznaric, in his excellent book *The Good Ancestor* (2020), provides many ways this form of inquiry can be undertaken.

A team leader or a team coach can invite the team to populate these segments by posting in each segment the groups that are critical for them.

For each stakeholder group, the team can be invited to think who are the key representatives that provide the link with that group.

It is then possible to colour code all three levels either green, amber or red to connote whether the relationship is:

- positive: an ally who could be an ambassador for the team;
- neutral;
- problematic and needs improving.

We have pioneered a team 360-degree feedback process called TeamConnect 360. This is not feedback on team members, but on how the team is collectively viewed by all its critical stakeholders, including its own team members (see Chapter 17). Where possible we would also coach the team in engaging directly with inquiry conversations with their key stakeholders (see case example in Chapter 3, p 58). Doing this for all the different stakeholders provides the team with a rich field of data to explore what they need to do differently.

As we explored in Chapter 1, it is impossible for chief executives to carry out all the stakeholder engagement necessary for a thriving organization, particularly in times of change and transformation. The leadership team members all have a role to play in transformational engagement, and for effective transformation it is important that all team members are skilled and impactful in this area and can represent the team in an aligned and congruent manner.

A team coach can help a team in this discipline in a variety of ways:

- Exploring the differences between:
  - *Informing*: which is one-way, factual and can be done remotely. It is useful for increasing knowledge.
  - *Communicating*: which is two-way and involves some form of discussion. It is useful for consultation and increasing understanding.
  - *Engagement*: which involves collaborative contribution to joint challenges, problems or questions. It is useful for increasing greater joint ownership and buy-in to the outcome.
  - *Partnering*: which involves coming together as different individuals or groups in order to work collaboratively as equals to achieve something that you cannot achieve apart and then producing an engagement strategy as a key aspect of their transformation strategy.
- Having each team member assess his or her own current authority, presence, impact (see Chapter 16) and leadership engagement capacity (Hawkins and Smith, 2013) and receive feedback from other members of the team and review any 360-degree or other feedback from staff and stakeholders.
- Working with the team to prepare, design and rehearse engagement events, for which they can then receive feedback from other members of the team and the coach.
- Coaching the team members live when they are engaging with their staff and stakeholders. This can include a variety of coaching approaches:
  - briefing and debriefing the leaders before and after the engagement;
  - 'pitch-side' or 'half-time' feedback and coaching;
  - help with facilitation of the engagement workshop or meeting.

Besides coaching the team on their collective engagement with stakeholders, the coach also needs to focus on how the team manage to integrate their collective leadership team role with the operational leadership of their own individual divisions or functions. I have already mentioned in Chapter 1 the challenge of multiple team and tribal membership, and being a 100 per cent member of both the collective leadership team and the divisional or functional team one leads. It is easy to fall back to being a representational go-between or a 'torn middle' (Oshry, 1995). In this role the divisional or functional leader represents the needs, aspirations and successes of his or her own team to the senior team, while defending his or her team from criticism and protecting their budget and resource allocation. Then the unfortunate go-between returns to lead his or her own team, having to deliver the report back from the senior team and to implement any decisions the senior team have made. One faculty dean who sat on a university's executive board described his role to me as the constant deliverer of bad news, from the faculty leadership team to the university executive board and vice versa. Under pressure, it is easy to disown your membership of the senior leadership team, and to talk about 'them' as though one was not part of 'them', or to describe how you had done your best, but the decision had gone against you!

Even more destructive to organizational integration and alignment is the leader who commits to a collective way forward in the leadership team, but ignores this when it becomes too difficult in his or her own division or function. The effect of this is that conflict moves out of the senior leadership team, where it ought to be addressed and resolved, and gets enacted at the next tier down, when the second-tier leaders of the divisional and functional groups find they are working to different and conflicting agendas. This can descend into silo mentality, 'turf wars', and the organization competing more internally than externally (see also Lencioni, 2006; Oshry, 2007).

These are all forms of organizational splitting that are common in most organizations, and separate and non-integrated team coaching for the different teams can make things worse as the challenges can lie between the teams, not within them. A team coach can address these issues by:

- working with the senior team to ensure that when agreements are made, the team spends time exploring and committing to how they will implement these decisions in their own areas;
- ensuring that the senior team make a temporary decision, which they commit to pilot in each of their functions and divisions and to report back on these pilots and amend the decisions accordingly;

- providing individual coaching to the members of the leadership team on how they connect the two aspects of their role: their membership of the top team with the leadership of their own division or function;
- inter-team or 'team of teams' coaching where there is facilitated dialogue between this team and the teams that report to it (see Chapter 11 and Hawkins and Boyle, 2018);
- working with the wider network of the team.

Cross and Katzenbach (2012) offer three tips for developing the leadership team so it becomes a hub of informal networks:

- design a group of smaller, more focused sub-groups, drawing in others from around the company as needed;
- invest in the quality of links between top-team members and the rest of the company;
- recognize that conflicts among top executives are often driven or exacerbated by broader tensions in the network, and deal with them at the constituent level first.

Increasingly when working with senior leadership teams I also work with their network of teams and sub-groups that are a critical part of their network, and recognize that a senior leadership team is an open system, with a permeable boundary.

Discipline 5: The core learning

The fifth discipline of systemic team coaching lies at the heart of where all the other four disciplines intersect, and is the discipline where the team are not just dealing with their current operational and transformational agenda, together and apart, but are developing their individual and collective capacity through learning together. Many writers are suggesting that ROL (rate of learning) is a better predictor of future growth than current ROI (return on investment), and that learning is the most sustainable competitive advantage in today's fast-changing world (Ismail, 2014; Hamel, 2012; Tebbits, 2014; Edmondson and Harvey, 2017). Peter Senge (1994:355) describes team learning as central to creating a learning organization, and Amy Edmondson (2002) describes teams as 'the unit of organizational learning'.

David Clutterbuck (2007: 125) defines the learning team as 'a group of people with a common purpose who take active responsibility for developing each other and themselves'. This is a useful definition but I would slightly extend it: 'a group of people with a common purpose who take active responsibility for developing each other, themselves, their team and the wider organization in which they operate, through both action learning and unlearning'.

This is because good team learning goes beyond the learning of the individuals within the team to the team itself learning, as well as attending to the learning in the wider system. Edmondson, Bohmer and Pisano (2001) carried out research on the effective learning of new procedures by surgical teams in hospitals, which demonstrated that 'the most successful teams had leaders who actively managed their team's learning efforts'. This is applicable to all leadership teams, who need not simply to execute existing processes but to quickly adapt to new circumstances and implement new ways of operating.

Teams are an ideal unit for action learning, as first espoused by Reg Revans in the years after the Second World War and used in management development ever since. Mike Pedler, one of the leading writers and practitioners, defines action learning as follows:

> Action learning couples the development of people in work organizations with action on their difficult problems... [it] makes the task the vehicle for learning and has three main components – people, who accept the responsibility for action on a particular task or issue; problems, or the tasks which are acted on; and the set of six or so colleagues who meet regularly to support and challenge each other to take action and to learn.
>
> (Pedler, 1997)

A team that commits to be a learning team is investing in developing the members' individual and collective underlying capacity through spending time on each phase of the classic action-learning cycle, shown in Figure 6.4.

We also need to bear in mind that different individuals and teams will have different learning styles that affect where they prefer to start their learning. Some people prefer to start with practical action and then reflect on what works and what does not. Others like to have the theory and explanation before planning to apply the model in action. Honey and Mumford (1992) have developed a number of methodologies for people to identify their learning styles. They show ways for individuals to explore how to utilize their dominant preference and also how to expand their repertoire of learning possibilities. This can be adapted by team coaches to look at the dominant learning style of the team.

FIGURE 6.4 The action learning cycle

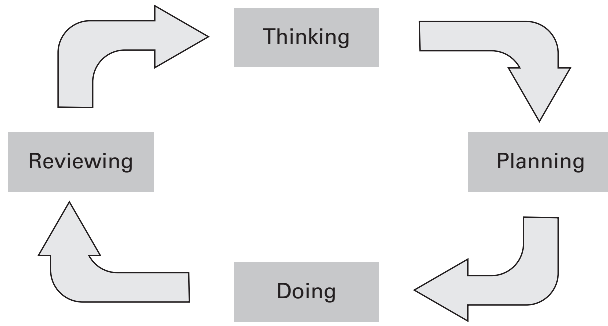
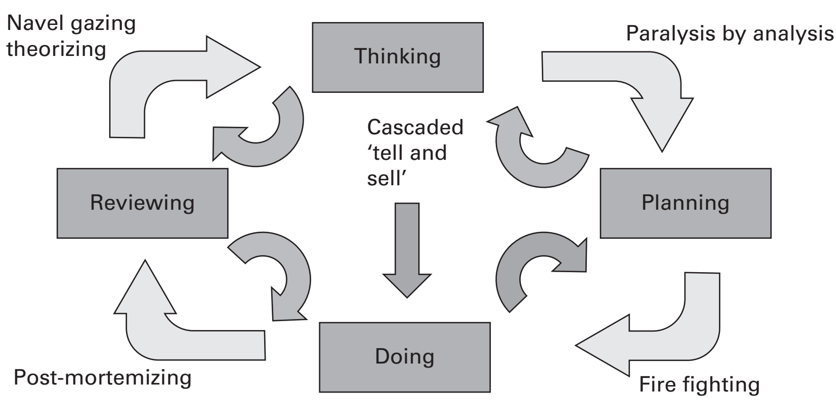


FIGURE 6.5 Short circuits and limiting learning patterns



I have used Honey and Mumford's (1992) work to develop our own model of learning short circuits to help teams to become more aware of their limiting learning patterns (see Figure 6.5). These need to be recognized before new learning can take place.

There are five main limiting learning styles that we have identified:

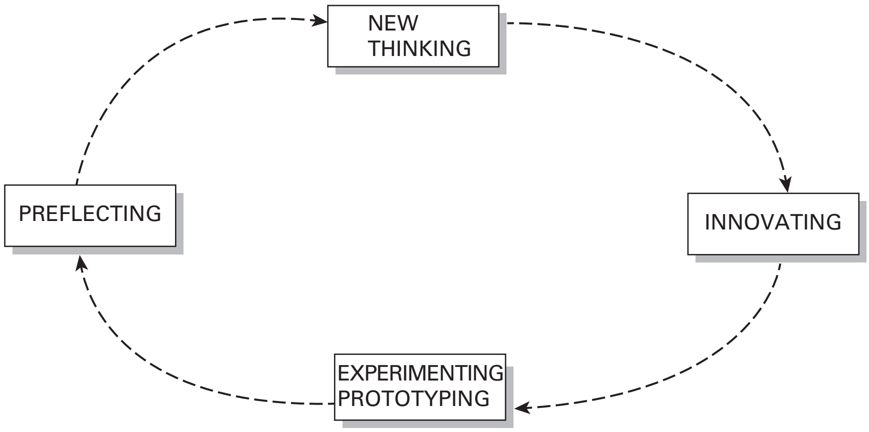
- *The fire-fighting or compulsive pragmatist team*: this is the 'plan-do-plan-do' trap where the motto is: 'If what we plan does not work, let us plan to do something different'. The learning stays at the level of trial and error. This sort of team will tend to have a short-term tactical and problem-solving bias.

- *The post-mortemizing team*: this is the 'do-reflect-do-reflect' trap where the motto is: 'Reflect on what went wrong and correct it'. The learning here is restricted to error correction. Here the team will over-focus on the recent past and what went wrong.
- *The navel-gazing theorists*: this is the 'reflect-theorize-reflect-theorize' trap where the motto is: 'Philosophize on how things could be better, but never risk putting the theories to the test'.
- *The paralysis by analysis team*: this is the 'analyse-plan-analyse some more' trap where the motto is: 'Think before we jump, plan how to do it and think a bit more'. Learning is limited by the fear of getting it wrong or taking a risk. The team with this learning bias will spend a lot of time in Discipline 2, trying to analyse what is wrong, getting consultancy help on how it could be done differently, listening to change proposals but fearful about trialling approaches, or engaging with others until they are confident they have got the perfect answer.
- *The totalitarian team*: this is the 'theorize-do' trap where the motto is: 'Work it out in theory and then tell them what we have decided.' This short-cut also leads to very little leadership engagement with the wider system, only an imposition of what the team have decided, which is a great way of creating resistance and failing to win hearts and minds to the transformational or operational way forward.

Another dimension of the learning cycle is that teams can get caught in going around the cycle in a linear, 'past-forward' style, always reflecting on what has worked or failed in the past and creating learning from this. While this is useful for 'continuous improvement' learning, it is limited in helping teams to create quantum shifts in their learning necessary for the disruptive changes that may be coming over the horizon (see Chapter 11). I help teams balance this 'reflection'-driven learning with a 'preflection' approach that works 'future-back', beginning from preflecting on future scenarios, emerging customer needs and possible disruptions. From this preflection the team create new thinking, and then move to innovation, prototyping and experimentation (see Figure 6.6).

Approaches like '3 Horizons Thinking' (Sharpe, 2013) and Casual Layered Analysis (Lustig, 2015) can be very helpful in this cycle (for more about both see Chapter 11 and 17). Using both 'reflection' and 'preflection' learning cycles together creates a developmental spiral. Combining 'reflection' on the past and 'preflection', learning from the future, increases the team's capacity for 'flection' in the present, and its future agility and resilience.

FIGURE 6.6 Future-based action learning circle



Teams need not only to learn but also to unlearn. This can include patterns of behaviour, ways of relating, beliefs and assumptions. 'Unlearning is the process by which organizations unlock the evolving of their culture' (Hawkins, 1999). Hedberg (1981) writes that: 'Very little is known about how organizational unlearning differs from that of individuals.' But his work explores how unlearning can be blocked, particularly by the danger of too much success: 'Organizations which have been poisoned by their own success are often unable to unlearn obsolete knowledge in spite of strong disconfirmations'. This is echoed by Bill Gates who said: 'Success is a lousy teacher!'

Helping a team to become aware of the strengths and limitations of their learning style is only step one. The team coach needs to then help the team develop new team practices which will help them break old habits and inculcate new more successful learning habits. However, as any of us who have tried to give up a smoking, eating or drinking habit know only too well, old habits are stronger than new good intentions. Good intentions need to be turned into committed new practice disciplines, which need some catalytic mechanism (Collins, 1999) to keep them alive.

An example of such a catalytic mechanism was arrived at in a large professional services firm where the partners recognized that a strong cultural pattern was for them to share views about other partners as gossip between each other, but rarely to give direct feedback. They recognized that this had a negative influence on leadership learning. As one senior partner put it: 'I have spent 25 years in a feedback-free zone – yet clearly other partners have heard lots of feedback about me!' The partners were wise enough to realize that all of them signing up to an agreement to not gossip about each other and to give direct feedback would not deliver a sustained shift. So, after some coaching on the nature of catalytic mechanisms, the 30 senior partners involved in the workshop committed to each other that the next time another partner told them about a third absent partner (Partner X), they would reply: 'So what did Partner X say when you told them?' When the gossiping partner then embarrassedly replied that he had not spoken to Partner X, they would respond with: 'How can I help you have that conversation?' Often the most powerful way to shift a culture is to first change the behaviour of the 'bystanders', and this is also true within a team.

The role of the team coach is to help the leadership team in becoming a self-sustaining learning team that will continue to learn and develop from its own rich experience well after the external team coach has finished working with them.

Coaching the interconnections between the disciplines

So far this chapter has concentrated on how to coach within the five distinct disciplines, but it is important to recognize that a great deal of team coaching is focused on connecting the flows between the disciplines. In Chapter 3 I showed how the commissioning and clarifying disciplines need to work together, so that co-missioning leads to full ownership of the mission by both the team sponsors and the team. It is also important that there is a constant cycling between Disciplines 2 and 3, so that clarity in what the team focuses on is aligned to how they are working on it together – task and process must go hand in hand. Similarly teams often need to be coached on ensuring there is congruence between how they are engaging within the team (3), with how they are collectively engaging the team's multifarious stakeholders (4). There must also be alignment between how the leadership team is engaging its stakeholders (4) and how the board and stakeholders are engaging (1) and informing the future.

The best way to develop the fifth discipline of core learning is often in the midst of working on the other disciplines, where the learning within the other disciplines can be developed, reflected on and double-loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Hawkins, 1995, 2004) developed, in which the team can notice the patterns of their behaviour, their collective emotional patterns, and the mindsets and assumptions that frame the way they see the world and learn ways of shifting these.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how the team coach or team leader can coach each of the five key disciplines and the flow between them.

In the next chapter I will look at how this work needs to be varied for different types of teams (management, project and customer account teams, etc), and then in Chapter 8 how the work can be carried out virtually. In Chapter 9 we will explore coaching formal or supervisory boards in commercial companies or the non-executive board in the public and third sector, or the cabinet board in local government. In Chapter 11, I will explore the application of systemic team coaching using the five disciplines model to strategy events, innovation teams, inter-team coaching, coaching partnerships and networks and creating a team-based culture.