

## **The Sacred Cow of Transferability: Why Training in One-on-One Coaching is Not Sufficient for the Team Setting**

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### **Abstract**

This article challenges two interrelated sacred cows in coaching based on the assumption that mastery in one-on-one coaching naturally transfers to effective team and organizational coaching. Drawing from systems theory, phenomenology, and collaborative facilitation principles, we argue that this transition has several requirements. These include fundamental knowledge about the theory of teams; understanding models for effective team functioning and dynamics; practice and skills development in collaborative facilitation; principles offered by organizational psychology; and ability to intentionally build or revitalize a team whose culture can be sustained over time. Our core thesis posits that effective team coaching necessitates the integration of theory, models, practices, and competencies in collaborative facilitation. This article proposes a paradigm shift toward team coaching development that successfully integrates these facets.

*Keywords: team coaching, collaborative facilitation, group dynamics, systems thinking, professional development, organizational psychology*

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### **Introduction**

This article posits that the skills and knowledge base of a certified one-on-one coach are necessary but not sufficient for team coaching. We present here areas of knowledge that are essential for successful team coaching that then must be translated into practice to develop the expertise needed for excellence in team coaching. Although there are many shared requirements, sufficient distinctions and important differences exist such that separate and equal levels of certification need to be considered. The translation of knowledge into practice must be accompanied by deep and powerful self-work necessitating developing internal awareness of one's own mindset and behaviors, and an ability to bring that work into the coaching setting. In this discussion we assert a related and growing second sacred cow: Present levels of additional training and learning to certify a one-on-one coach as a team coach are inadequate. Clients who engage the services of a team coach have every right to expect an expertise in one-on-one coaching as well as a deep level of knowledge, expertise and practice about group dynamics, facilitation, systems and organizational development. This article addresses two sacred cows:

Sacred Cow 1: One-on-one coaches are inherently, without further knowledge, training and skills, sufficiently equipped to accept team coaching engagements.

Sacred Cow 2: One-on-one coaches who attend Team Coaching Programs developed to meet the standards of ICF and EMCC are sufficiently knowledgeable, skilled and competent to become team coaches.

## **Sacred Cows**

### ***Linear Skill Transferability***

The coaching profession generally has a belief that one-on-one coaching mastery provides sufficient foundation for all coaching contexts. This sacred cow is evidenced in training programs, credentialing standards, and professional development pathways. When it comes to team coaching, most coaching education follows a predictable sequence: intensive one-on-one coaching skill development, followed by relatively brief modules on “team coaching” or “group coaching” as natural extensions.

This assumption reflects linear thinking – the belief that expertise can be directly transferred across contexts without fundamental augmentation of knowledge, skills and abilities relevant to the contextual setting. Decades of organizational psychology, group dynamics, and organizational development research reveal a more complex reality: the transition from one-on-one to collective coaching represents a qualitative shift requiring different organizing principles, mindset, and skills.

Team effectiveness and small group research consistently show that high-performing teams exhibit behaviors and dynamics that cannot be predicted from individual member characteristics alone (Argyris, 1977; Hackman, 2002; Senge, 2006). One-on-one coaching can flourish within individual relationship space, but team coaching demands what we call expanded and collective awareness – attention to group process, shared mental models, emergent team behaviors, and patterns that exist beyond individual relationships. The team coach must have a firm understanding of how individual member behaviors can impact the dynamic, be able to diagnose it in real time, and implement an intervention that furthers the team dynamic while helping the team learn. Once the coach begins interacting with the team, their presence has an impact on the team dynamic. The presence and interventions of a team coach become part of the team’s evolving dynamic and must be managed carefully, including planning for the coach’s exit, leaving the team to perform autonomously.

### ***Team Coaching Training is Vital***

The rapid growth in team coaching’s popularity suggests an increased need of skilled team coaches in the coming decade. Passmore (2021) reported that over 50% of coaches offer team or group coaching; with estimates of certified team coaches at only 2000-4000, most team coaches are uncredentialed. Thus, it appears that team coaching engagements are being conducted by coaches trained primarily in one-on-one coaching. Some may have additional team coaching training from professional organizations, and others may not.

Our interest in this area stems from a deep understanding of both one-on-one and team approaches to coaching, and a desire to ensure that both team coaches and team coaching clients are able to maximize their outcomes from any engagement. For the team coach, it would be continued expansion of their skills and abilities to help teams navigate increasingly complex

challenges. For the teams it would be maximizing their learning and development so they can self-facilitate, only bringing in the team coach when necessary.

We believe that coaches taking on team coaching engagements would value being deeply knowledgeable and skilled in team dynamics. The growing need for well-trained and effective team coaches provides an opportunity for the design, development, and implementation of team coaching programs that encompasses the breadth of knowledge and theory, the skill development and practice, and real-world experience that is necessary, distinct, and complementary to one-on-one coaching training.

## **The Non-Linear Reality: From Monadic to Systemic Practice**

### ***Philosophical Foundations***

Edmund Husserl's phenomenology reveals why one-on-one coaching expertise doesn't automatically extend to team coaching (Husserl, 1913; Husserl, 2012). In one-to-one coaching, phenomenological reduction allows coaches to bracket external complexities and focus intensively on the client's lived experience. The coach's mastery lies in establishing and maintaining this concentrated attention while facilitating client self-discovery. Well-rounded coaches are trained to effectively guide clients toward their desired futures, help them increase effectiveness, and equip them with skills for surmounting the challenges facing them, such as leading a team that has hit a rocky patch.

When clients tell us their story, their goals for coaching, and their concerns, our role is at its least compounded. When we receive data back from any evaluation [e.g. surveys and interviews] our role becomes a bit more complex. We begin to see the client as part of a system. When there is an ability to observe the client in one-on-one and team settings, our role is much more complex. This is where we start to edge into a 'team coaching' mindset and the additional knowledge, competency and skills that team coaching requires. Team and organizational coaching exist within what Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others termed intersubjective fields (Merleau-Ponty & Landes, 2012). These are spaces in which multiple consciousnesses intersect and co-create emergent properties that cannot be broken back down into individual components. Coaches that work with teams are simultaneously attending to:

- Individual phenomenological experiences
- Relationship dynamics
- Team content and process goals
- Team development and evolution
- Emergence of team destructive patterns
- Systemic emergent properties
- Organizational contextual influences
- Team mindset and behavior

This represents a significant shift from focusing on a singular consciousness to engaging with a collective consciousness and emergent phenomena.

### ***Team Effectiveness and Emergent Properties***

Research in organizational behavior shows that effective teams develop what scholars call emergent states, or team-level phenomena that arise from member interactions not initially present in individuals (Bion, 1989; Hackman, 2002). These include member attitudes and feelings, shared mental models, collective efficacy, team cohesion and trust, as well as collaborative norms (Fyhn et al., 2023, 2024). Emergence is not a predictable phenomenon. Google's Project Aristotle, studying hundreds of teams, found that team effectiveness depends primarily on these emergent dynamics rather than individual member talent (Duhigg, 2016).

One-on-one coaching operates within relatively predictable cause-and-effect relationships: a well-timed question leads to client insight, presence creates safety for vulnerability, and goal setting generates forward momentum. Team contexts introduce what organizational development experts call "non-linear dynamics," where a side comment can generate strong emotions and have disproportionate effects, and where a large effort may produce minimal change. For example, a single comment about budget constraints during a team meeting might silence an entire team; a well-executed process observation could unlock a challenging impasse and make way for productive dialogue and respectful disagreement. Consider a team where each individual member is collaborative and innovative, yet collectively they struggle with decision-making paralysis, or a group of highly competent professionals who individually excel at problem-solving but together create risk-averse group dynamics and experience trouble moving past stalemate.

Emergent team characteristics such as trust patterns, communication norms, decision-making styles, giving and receiving feedback and power distribution become the primary focus in team coaching. These are the dynamics that are made explicit when they are observed (diagnosis in real time) and where the coach intervenes using collaborative strategies and principles to address patterns that are getting in the team's way or build on positive breakthroughs allowing for faster and smoother progress on team goals. The role of the team coach then is to help the group shift from what might feel like a team of experts into an expert team. Noticing these occurrences in real time, making team-level interventions to capture the moment, and turning it into a learning opportunity, can have profound implications for the team. Most importantly, it becomes something they can practice and apply as they continue working together.

The implications extend beyond technique to fundamental coach identity and skill set. One-on-one coaches can maintain clear role boundaries as "thinking partner" or "accountability ally." Team coaches must navigate multiple simultaneous relationships while facilitating group process, observing team dynamics, designing interventions, and stewarding collective wisdom – all while modeling, maintaining, observing and noting in a non-attributed manner, individual helping and hindering behaviors and encouraging the adoption of the collaborative stance and principles they're helping the team develop.

### ***Beyond One-on-One Coaching: The Facilitative Integration Imperative***

Competency in team coaching demands what we call “facilitative integration” – the seamless blending of coaching and collaborative facilitation competencies. This integration addresses three critical team needs:

*Collective Intelligence Activation:* Rather than being the primary source of insight, coaches become stewards of group wisdom. They are responsible for helping the team understand and create conditions for collective exploration, discovery, and outcomes often in real time with tools provided to help them practice.

*Multiple Perspective Navigation:* Team coaches help groups learn to engage in dialogue with each other and to put collaborative principles into practice in their work and relationships (Bohm, 2004; Romney, 2005; Sokoloff et al., 2016). In David Bohm’s sense, dialogue entails listening and striving for shared understanding while honoring diverse viewpoints, rather than debating for positional victory.

*Emergent Process Design:* Unlike predetermined one-on-one coaching protocols or frameworks, team engagements require adaptive design capabilities, diagnosing and intervening effectively to real-time group dynamics, and attention to emerging needs while adhering to collaborative principles. These complex, intertwined areas of knowledge and skills, not part of the accreditation in one-on-one coaching, require in-depth learning, study and practice.

### **The Embodiment Imperative: Modeling Collaborative Practice**

#### ***The Congruence Principle in Group Dynamics***

Group dynamics research describes observational behavior as people unconsciously mirror the behaviors they observe, particularly from those in authority roles. Albert Bandura’s social learning theory demonstrates that people learn more from observing behavior than from hearing instructions (Bandura, 1971; Bandura et al., 1961). Perhaps this is what underlies the phrase *if you can’t walk the walk, don’t talk the talk*. This creates what could be referred to as a congruence imperative in team coaching: coaches cannot effectively facilitate collaborative practices they haven’t internalized. Likewise, if they cannot model them, the team the coach is working with cannot experience their impact or benefit from observing them in real time (Fusco et al., 2015; Rogers, 1961). Emotional radar, a component of emotional intelligence, serves as a sophisticated detection system for authenticity and consistency between espoused values and actual behaviors, or what Chris Argyris called theories-in-use (Argyris, 1977).

When coaches advocate collaborative decision-making while making unilateral process decisions, encourage vulnerability while remaining personally guarded, or suggest team members become more open-minded while sticking doggedly to the agenda they developed, team members immediately sense the incongruence. This undermines the trust and psychological safety essential for effective team development. Team coaches must demonstrate collaborative principles through concrete actions that team members can observe and eventually emulate.

Kurt Lewin’s foundational work on group dynamics shows that sustainable behavior change happens when people experience new ways of being, not just new ways of thinking.

Teams need to experience collaborative leadership before they can develop these capacities themselves. A first step is seeing and experiencing the coach modeling collaborative principles through their facilitation. A next step would be to engage in team exercises or simulations that help them practice it and then move them into low stakes real world settings to give them a try (Lewin, 1947).

### ***Practical Modeling: From Theory to Lived Experience***

Organizational development research shows that sustainable change requires putting into practice the principles people say they believe in. The space between the way someone says they want to behave and their ability to do it is an insight-to-action gap (Argyris, 1977; Bennett, 2024). The easiest way to learn about one's own gaps is to ask for feedback and make change, which is hard work.

Even once we get glimpses of our mental models, knowing how to act differently is not obvious. (Senge, 2006)

Some essential skills for collaborative facilitation include:

**Process Transparency:** making facilitative thinking visible by sharing decision-making rationale, real-time observations about group dynamics, and reasoning behind intervention choices. *“I'm noticing we've been discussing this for 15 minutes without hearing from half the group. I'm thinking we should pause and create space for other perspectives before moving forward.”* And *“It sounds like you are seeing this topic differently with about half of you suggesting you move forward and the other half articulating some concerns. Could we check in with each person to see where they are on this? And if we do have different thoughts about moving forward, I'd like to suggest we explore the thinking behind each person's view. Does that work for everyone?”*

**Collaborative Co-creation:** moving beyond expert-designed agendas for strategic planning, retreat execution, or other activities. Genuine co-creation involves developing a shared vision for project or event outcome followed by iterative steps that progressively incorporate all views and perspectives. Any plan developed to serve as a guide for the team that reflects the perceived needs of only one person may alienate and frustrate team members, especially if the ideas of how to proceed were solicited from many team members. At best it may feel as if their input was deemed not useful. At worst they might feel manipulated. Sometimes there are constraints, and when there are, transparency is essential, so team members understand what led to any decision made without full participation and consultation.

**Distributed Authority:** sharing power for both content and process decisions, demonstrating what shared leadership looks like in practice, and empowering the team to function successfully on its own (Konradt, 2011). Rather than maintaining traditional facilitator control or taking it upon themselves to select a tool or framework for the team to work through a situation, coaches turn it over to the team. *“Let's deconstruct the last few minutes and figure out how we got here. Will that work for you?”* When understood and debriefed, the coach can propose the team develop a process for them to follow to refer to if something similar happens again in the future.

**Ground Rules, Norms, and Agreements:** agreeing on and setting behavioral standards for team members to follow and providing shared expectations. Whether engaging informally or gathering more formally for a one-hour meeting or three-day retreat, the rules of engagement have been agreed to. In the team coach's facilitative role, it is just as important to declare behaviors you might display in that role as a means of being fully transparent with the group. For example, the group may have a ground rule of not interrupting, and as a facilitator, it might benefit the group for you to intervene prior to there being a break in the conversation. This would be stated up front, *"As facilitator I may break in with an observation or ask everyone to pause at some point if I notice people are not contributing or providing space for others to speak up if they so choose."*

**Real-Time Learning and Adaptation:** team members need to learn, make mistakes, and reflect (Edmondson, 2019). Team coaches serve as important role models when they demonstrate a collaborative mindset by openly acknowledging one's own mistakes, asking for feedback, and making whatever adjustments are needed in the moment. *"I just noticed that when I shifted topics, we experienced a few awkward moments together. When I tried to engage you in a discussion about what is not working that led to complete silence. So, I'm thinking something is really not working and I've contributed to it in a big way. Are you willing to share with me what you observed and what you are thinking so we can figure it out?"*

## The 'Sacred' Container

### *Creating Psychological Safety and Trust*

Coaches create a sacred container for the team when they embody collaborative principles (Bion, 1989). In this space trust builds, psychological safety is created, and people are willing to speak up and share their thoughts and ideas (Bennett, 2025; Bennett, 2026; Edmondson, 2019). Such an environment enables authentic engagement. These 'sacred containers' have specific characteristics that must be actively nurtured to be sustained:

**Structure with Emergent Flexibility:** clear frameworks that can adapt to emerging needs. Co-creating detailed agendas while stopping for a "process break" when group dynamics require attention. A coach might notice that when one person leaned forward to make a point, another person pushed themselves away from the table and rolled their eyes. This is the perfect time to bring the behaviors forward and talk them through. *"I'm sensing there might be something we need to explore here. What are others noticing?"*

**Establishing Norms and Process Agreements:** ground rules establishing co-created commitments that the coach models consistently. Team ground rules could include: *"All input is welcome," "What's said here stays here,"* and *"We will use 'Yes, and' to build on each other's ideas."* The coach must consistently demonstrate these behaviors, creating permission for others to follow, and improve.

**Decision-Making Transparency:** making process explicit before discussing content begins. *"Will this be an individual decision with input? Majority vote? Consensus? Or fist-to-five (fist for strong opposition, five fingers for strong support)?"* Transparency prevents groups from spending time generating ideas, only to have the leader announce a predetermined decision

at the end: *“Why did you ask us for our ideas and opinions when you knew what you were going to do?”*

### ***Interventions for Learning Purposes***

When team coaches engage to help teams intentionally develop as a cohesive unit, it’s necessary to diagnose in real time and then to intervene. The coach sees an interaction between two people and recognizes that they are not listening to each other. And so, the coach intervenes to help with the conversation. Over time the team learns to do so with each other. The intervention is an invitation to the other person to dialogue about a concern, to exchange thoughts, and to ask questions that lead to a shared understanding. Team members learn to start a difficult conversation by stating what their concern is and asking for a conversation. The team norms and agreements can make the process easier. *“I think I just noticed something in the dynamic between A and B. Did anyone else notice something?”* If yes *“How did you feel about it? How do you think others felt about it?”*

**Productive Disagreement:** ensuring all perspectives are heard and valued through both structure and real-time attention. This requires that we pay attention to who has shared ideas, perspectives, and thoughts. Where viewpoints differ, approaches are questioned, or frustration is expressed, there are ways of working through it successfully. This often requires turning confusion or disagreement into collective learning through “dialogue” rather than “debate.” If conflicts arise that are not managed by the team, the coach helps the group examine underlying assumptions and mental models rather than argue positions. *“It sounds like we have different theories about what constitutes commitment. Instead of debating sides, let’s explore the interests and needs that drives them both. Willing to try?”*

**Continuous Learning:** regular reflection on content, process, and relationship effectiveness. Tools like “plus-delta” (what worked, what could be improved), maintenance meetings, or after-action reviews provide valuable views on the same event. They cultivate a team’s ability to examine their own processes, learn, and adapt.

### **The Competency Gap: Existing Team Coaching Programs May Benefit from Design Enhancements**

#### ***Preparation for Team Coaching***

People typically enter the coaching profession because they are interested in helping individuals overcome challenges in their work, and at work, many of those individuals are engaged with teams that are performing poorly or completely dysfunctional. It is only natural that clients engage a coach with comments such as *“They’re just not performing as well as I hoped and know they can”* or *“Individually, they’re all strong performers, yet as a team we are not clicking”* and *“Can you help me and my team?”* Whether credentialed or not, trained as a team coach or not, one-on-one coaches are entering team coaching engagements.

Many of the same skills that lead to excellence in one-on-one coaching are necessary for effective team coaching. Those skills include, but are not limited to, active listening, powerful questioning, building trust, practicing ethically, sustaining presence, catalyzing learning and growth, and viewing the client at the center. Thus, one-on-one coach training serves as a strong

foundation for team coaching. Yet, it is equally possible to come to team coaching through a different pathway, one that emanates from organizational development and psychology. Team coaches who are trained in this manner would benefit from rigorous training in one-on-one coaching to master those distinct skills. We turn now to addressing the second Sacred Cow, the notion that the training and credentialing people engage in as they study to become team coaches needs to better prepare them.

A review of the literature on team coaching with particular emphasis on the key skills and competencies required reveals areas of knowledge, proficiency, and experience for effective team coaching. Table 1 lists essential skills and abilities.

Key Skills	Competency	Citation
<b>Multi-Perspective Competency Assessment</b>	Evaluating coaches' ability to work with multiple viewpoints simultaneously without losing anyone or forcing premature convergence. This might involve facilitating a simulated team conflict where assessment focuses on the coach's ability to help each party feel heard while moving toward collaborative resolution.	(Clutterbuck, 2020; Clutterbuck et al., 2019; Hackman, 2002; Jones et al., 2019; Peters & Carr, 2013)
<b>Collective Intelligence Facilitation</b>	Testing coaches' capacity to create conditions where group wisdom emerges rather than one-on-one expertise dominates. Assessment scenarios might include facilitating a team facing a complex decision with no clear "right" answer, evaluating how well the coach helps the group access and integrate their diverse knowledge.	(Clutterbuck, 2020; Clutterbuck et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Peters & Carr, 2013; Widdowson et al., 2020)
<b>Use of structured Group Observational Schema</b>	Team coaches should be able to demonstrate the ability to use group dynamics observational schema. Basic sociograms provide a visual representation of communications and relationships. Bales' Interaction Process Analyses (IPA) provide insight into the team's verbal dynamics balance of task and process focus and his more recent iteration, SYMLOG, extends that work with influence, social warmth, and task vs relationship ratings	(Bales, 1950a, 1950b; Bales et al., 1979; Peters & Carr, 2013; Widdowson et al., 2020)
<b>Real-Time Process Intervention</b>	Examining coaches' ability to notice and skillfully address group dynamics as they emerge. This requires assessment methods that capture coaches' responses to shifting energy, conflict, disengagement, or any other process challenge that doesn't exist in one-on-one coaching contexts. To do this effectively, coaches must identify and name what is happening in real time and bring it to the attention of the team.	(Clutterbuck, 2020; Clutterbuck et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Peters & Carr, 2013; Widdowson et al., 2020)

<b>Cultural Systems Intelligence</b>	Evaluating coaches' sensitivity to organizational context, power dynamics, and cultural factors that influence team behavior. Assessment might involve case studies requiring coaches to design interventions that account for hierarchical structures, cultural diversity, or historical team patterns.	(Hackman, 2002; Peters & Carr, 2013; Senge, 2006, 2014; Widdowson et al., 2020)
<b>Building Trust and Psychological Safety</b>	Examining coaches' ability to instill in teams the ability to establish trust and psychological safety and then maintain it, including once the coaching engagement has ended.	(Åkerlund et al., 2021; Clutterbuck, 2020; Clutterbuck et al., 2019; Edmondson, 2018; Jones et al., 2019)
<b>Collaboration Principles including Enabling Productive Conflict</b>	Examining coaches' ability to help a team learn, practice, and apply collaborative principles in real time and adjust as needed to the team's natural evolution. This includes helping the team learn to engage in conflict productively.	(Åkerlund et al., 2021; Bennett, 2025; Clutterbuck, 2020; Clutterbuck et al., 2019; Hawkins, 2021; Widdowson et al., 2020)
<b>Embodied Collaborative Modeling</b>	Perhaps most challenging to assess, this involves evaluating whether coaches authentically demonstrate the collaborative principles they espouse. Assessment would examine congruence between stated values and enacted behaviors under pressure.	(Clutterbuck, 2020; Clutterbuck et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2024; Peters & Carr, 2013; Rajasinghe et al., 2022; Widdowson et al., 2020)

**Table 1. Listing of Essential Skills and Abilities for a Team Coach**

In order to be effective in each of the domains mentioned in Table 1, team coaches must be skilled facilitators.

When the facilitator creates a climate of safety, acceptance and understanding, the group (team) moves toward greater openness, honesty and responsibility. The group (team) develops its own constructive norms and purposes. (Rogers, 1961)

When the team coach can adopt a collaborative mindset and behaviors and authentically step into collaborative facilitation to enable the team dynamic to happen, the group becomes a team.

In addition to the competencies, the effective team coach must have their practice, skills, and strategies grounded in theory. Without the frameworks that theories and models provide, coaches become a package of tools and activities. The auto mechanic with a huge toolbox, first must understand that they are working on a car, and that all the parts of the car are inter-related.

### ***Theories, Models, and Frameworks of Team Development***

Team coaches have huge toolboxes to help clients address problems, narrow gaps, develop understanding and build trust, all targeted at helping them achieve a goal and reach mature levels of process success. The team coach can explain the choices they are making in their work with the team because it is grounded in theoretical frameworks that underpin their thinking and

actions. We offer several theories and frameworks as exemplars of those used by the effective team coach. They guide the team and can explain the reasoning for the counsel provided.

We start with Carl Rogers whose writings focus on humanistic psychology and group facilitation. While Rogers did not write about team development *per se*, his theories underpin and influence many who discuss team development from Lewin to Schein to Hackman (Hackman, 2002; Rogers & Henderson, 1989; Schein, 2017). Rogers held that there were necessary conditions for a group to function and develop. These conditions are highly relevant to today's teams and team coaching (Hackman, 2002). Those conditions include:

- Safety and trust need to be present and require a judgement-free zone
- Congruence, or authenticity, means people are themselves and not the positions they represent so that trust can be fostered
- Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) in a team takes the form of valuing individual input even when disagreed with. Acceptance fosters feelings of belonging
- Empathy experienced as non-defensive listening, and appreciative inquiry allows team members to feel understood, enhancing collaboration
- Shared Responsibility occurs when teams feel they are jointly responsible for outcomes.

Bruce Tuckman is probably best known for his Stages of Team Development – forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning – that has served as a foundation for many successive models (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Wheelan expanded on Tuckman's four stages by providing strategies that leaders can use to help their teams in each of the phases (Wheelan, 2010). Another is an integrated model that interweaves components from Tuckman to explicitly capture the essence of the team maturing over time and applied it to organizational settings (White, 2009).

In working with business and team start-ups, Wilkinsy and his colleague L. Crosby Deaton offered four stages of development which resonated more with the people facing challenges at work. Blunder: crude trial and error period fraught with speed bumps and potholes. Thunder: conflict, competing ideas, working at cross purposes. Plunder: getting their act together, rapid and loud movement forward. Success breeds success. Asunder: failure to expand the Plunder norms system wide. Natural adjournment. Feeling understood quickly, teams having great difficulty were willing to start working with the challenges made explicit.

Amy Edmondson's pioneering work on psychological safety is characterized by the team members' willingness to take risks in sharing ideas, problem solving, and decision-making (Edmondson, 2019). Team members must be able to be honest, voice their concerns, share accountability, provide direct feedback and offer ideas without fear of repercussions when they are together. Psychological Safety is not about being polite, it's about creating a safe environment so the most difficult conversation can be held.

Richard Hackman offers four conditions that can help the team move forward: real team, compelling direction, enabling structure, supportive organizational context and expert coaching in teamwork. Creating these conditions helps, but does not guarantee, team success (Hackman, 2002).

In his seminal work, *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge applies systems theory to organizations, teams and their leaders. He offers tenets that successful organizations use to adapt and grow, including systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning, and that are crucial to any form of team coaching. Clients are part of relationships, patterns and teams that are interactive and related and can move beyond the sum of individual parts to increase cumulative competency (Senge, 2006).

Developing and becoming facile with moving these theories into practices demands deep self-work, strong dedication to training, direct and indirect feedback for improvement, and much trial and error to truly achieve excellence.

### **Recommended Essential Course Work for Effective Team Coaching**

#### ***The Distinctive Talents of Team Coaching***

The complexities that distinguish coaching a team compared to coaching an individual necessitate different knowledge, skills and training. The team is now your client, and they are part of a system which demands attention to the intricate relationships, power structures, and unwritten rules of the team and organization, as well as the team context. Systems competence requires coaches to think and act systemically even in one-on-one sessions. Their mindset must reflect attention to the full team even while coaching individuals who are running and participating in teams. Effective team coaching includes competency in collaborative facilitation and embodied integration, both of which are typically beyond the scope of one-on-one coach training and practice. Embodied integration is the meta-competency of weaving one-on-one coaching and collaborative facilitation into coherent practice as evidenced by authentic modeling under pressure, adaptive intervention design based on emerging needs, complexity navigation, and comfort with ambiguity.

Integrating the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities described above, we have developed a program framework for team coaching. We believe it can serve as a template against which coaches interested in enhancing their effectiveness could consult to assess how they can increase their skillset. Likewise, clients seeking team coaches could avail themselves to the framework as they consider what skills and abilities they would like the team coach they engage to possess.

<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Competency Achieved</b>	<b>Semester Hours</b>
<b>Course: Basic Group/Team Dynamic</b>	Understanding the Importance of Group Dynamics knowledge to Team Coaching and applying the theoretical models and frameworks to discuss and map the evolution of your team and your role(s) in that process.	30 hr: class, assignments, experience

<b>Course: Observation of Groups/Teams in Organic settings - Tools and Techniques</b>	Developing competency in communication analyses tools, identifying and assessing decision-making, problem solving processes used, employing feedback, recognition, and group maintenance behaviors. Apply learning to a case study including use of diagnostic instruments.	50 hr: class, assignments, experience
<b>Course: Team Development Theories and Frameworks</b>	Understanding and applying the Importance of Group/Team Theories and Frameworks to Team Coaching. Application of learning to analyze a developing team and their evolution.	30 hr: class, application
<b>Course: Organizational Development</b>	The Importance of OD to Team Coaching across different sectors, including understanding the role of organizational culture, Impact of Leadership and senior leadership behaviors and styles. Application and use of organizational diagnostic tools in real time.	35 hr: class, assignments, experience
<b>Course: One-on-one coaching is important to team coaching</b>	The importance of 1-1 coaching to Team Coaching through models, diagnostic tools, interviews, instruments, observations, and ethical considerations.	30 hr: class, assignments, experience
<b>Course: Team Coaching Practicums</b>		
Conduct team development workshops on communication, problem solving, conflict management and giving and receiving feedbacks		25 hr
Observe a Team Coaching engagement		20 hr
Team Coaching assistance and Observation. Working alongside a fully qualified Team Coach over a minimum of a 10 week assignment		20 hr
Supervised Team Coaching engagement. Minimum 10 hours of Team contact		50 hr

**Table 2. Program Framework for a Team Coaching Program**

***The Role and Responsibility of Certification Criteria***

A team is a complex, adaptive system nested in other complex, adaptive systems. Coaching a team requires a whole raft of additional capabilities and, in particular, an ability to help the team see and influence both its internal systems and those around it. (Institute of Coaching, 2025)

We couldn't agree more. Coaching teams interacting with other teams, housed in organizations interacting with other organizations, requires deep knowledge of the theories that inform team and organizational dynamics, a highly developed catalog of skills and competencies, and a high level of self-awareness and mastery.

During the height of the period when so many people were declaring themselves ‘life coaches,’ EMCC and ICF and other credentialing organizations released a “Professional Charter for Coaching and Mentoring” (*Professional Charter - EN VI - 17.12.2021.Pdf: EMCCDrive, 2022*). This charter is a clarion call for in-depth training, standards of excellence, and the need for coaching as a profession to be trusted by consumers.

We believe that team coaching is at a similar juncture. Whether through accreditations like those offered by EMCC or ICF, or through a personal journey of in-depth learning, supervision, mentoring and experiences, the authors are pleased to note that among the dozens and dozens of one-on-one coaches we know, to a person, they are a credit to the profession. They are knowledgeable, skilled and committed to the highest standards [1]. We cannot say the same for those accepting contracts for team coaching.

Below we present the competencies from our program framework (Table 3) and compare the individual elements to the standards put forth by two major accrediting organizations. The table shows the proposed framework for a Team Coaching Program Curriculum offered by this article (Table 2) compared against the standards put forth by the ICF to attain ACTC Certification and by the EMCC to attain their ITCA. In the individual cells Yes indicates the standards are aligned with the framework. Some indicates some alignment with the framework. No indicates that this piece does not align with the framework. (Advanced Certification in Team Coaching (ACTC) Candidate Guide, 2025; EMCC Global Team Coaching Assessment and Accreditation Framework, 2023).

<b>Framework as a Benchmark</b>	<b>ICF ACTC (2024)</b>	<b>EMCC ITCA (v0.8, 2023)</b>
<b>Team Coaching as Separate Discipline</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Systems Thinking Proficiency</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Group Dynamics &amp; Patterns</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Collaborative Facilitation</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Some:</b> Implied, not explicit.
<b>Structured Observation Skills</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Some:</b> Coaches observe and respond to team dynamics. No specific structures or assessed exercises.
<b>Embodiment of Collaborative Principles</b>	<b>Some:</b> Expected to “model... effective communication and collaboration.”	<b>Some:</b> Embedded collaborative ethos – not explicitly evaluated.

<b>Framework as a Benchmark</b>	<b>ICF ACTC (2024)</b>	<b>EMCC ITCA (v0.8, 2023)</b>
<b>Psychological Safety &amp; Trust</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Some:</b> Foundational trust factors addressed indirectly. Safe climate is implicit. “Psychological safety” absent.
<b>Measurement Literacy</b>	<b>No:</b> Knowledge is expected. Its application is not assessed.	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Total Training/Formation Hours (290+)</b>	<b>Some:</b> Requires 60 hours of team coaching education plus 48 hours of team coaching experience	<b>Some:</b> Guidelines list ~150 hours total learning for a Practitioner-level program (~ 500 hours for Sr Practitioner)
<b>Supervised Team Coaching (≥50 hours)</b>	<b>Some:</b> Requires 5 hours of coaching supervision total.	<b>Some:</b> Monthly or quarterly supervision (~6–18+ hours/year).
<b>Observed Team Coaching Performance</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Use of Team Diagnostics &amp; Outcome Evidence</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>

**Table 3. Benchmarking ICF and EMCC Team Coaching Standards Against a Framework for a Team Coaching Program**

As the table shows, there are significant differences between current criteria and what we propose is a minimum level of training and education needed for effective team coaching. The ICF provides less than optimal requirements in Embodiment of Collaborative Processes, Total Training/Formation Hours and Supervised Team Coaching. EMCC provides less than optimal requirements in the Embodiment of Collaborative Principles, Psychological Safety and Trust, Total Training/Formation Hours, and Supervised Team Coaching. Neither the ICF nor EMCC provide any standards for Observed Team Coaching Performance and Use of Team Diagnostics and Outcome Evidence.

**Conclusion: Toward Integral Team Coaching**

This article challenges the notion that one-on-one coaches are, without further knowledge, training and skills, sufficiently competent to engage in team coaching engagements. We believe adequate evidence is provided to suggest that training as a one-on-one coach provides a strong foundation for team coaching but is not in itself sufficient.

We also challenge the related yet distinct notion that one-on-one coaches who attend Team Coaching Programs developed to meet the standards of ICF and EMCC are sufficiently knowledgeable, skilled and competent to become team coaches. We believe that team coaching programs can provide important knowledge and skills in the pursuit of team coaching competencies. We also believe that there are untapped opportunities in team coaching training as

evidenced by the metrics of two popular team coaching accreditation organizations, ICF and EMCC.

Effective team coaching requires additional skills and a fundamental transformation in how we understand coaching itself. The integration of collaborative facilitation represents more than professional development – it constitutes evolution toward what we might call systems team coaching.

This evolution demands coaches who can hold multiple paradoxes simultaneously: being both expert and co-learner, both directive and collaborative, both focused and systemic. Such coaches will be equipped not merely to develop individual leaders but to catalyze collective leadership capacity.

The sacred cow of skill transferability has served the profession well but now constrains our evolution. Team coaching is a specialized discipline with its own required body of knowledge and professional standards. As our world's challenges become increasingly complex and interconnected, the coaching profession must evolve beyond individual mastery toward collective wisdom cultivation. This article argues that such evolution requires not just new competencies but new ways of being, thinking, and relating. Modeling collaborative principles is not optional. It is essential for creating the trust and safety necessary for authentic collective transformation.

In embracing this challenge, the coaching profession can move beyond its sacred cows toward practices that serve not just individual development but the larger evolution of collective consciousness our interconnected world demands.

Given this, we would like to finish by asking: If we accept that team coaching demands fundamentally different competencies than individual coaching, what responsibility does each of us – as practitioners, clients, or standards-setters – have for ensuring that those who coach teams possess the depth of knowledge, supervised practice, and embodied collaborative capability that teams deserve?

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### **Footnote**

[1] Neither author holds one-on-one nor Team credentials from EMCC, ICF or any other 'credentialing' organization. Both have decades of training, formal learning, and thousands of hours of experience coaching and helping teams and individuals in organizational settings.

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