
Becoming a Transformational Leadership Team with Leadership Team Coaching

Executive Summary

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Most Executives know what it feels like to be part of a high performing team. They have experienced it at some point in their career, and can recall the sense of shared inspiration, perhaps also a sense of daunting challenge, but also an experience of effortless flow, of joint effectiveness, of resolution of challenges and tensions, of creativity and extraordinary achievement. These experiences are often part of what one feels when engaging as member of a high performing team.

For many Executive teams¹, the potential from teaming is very important. In working with groups at the top, we often ask ‘What can the Executive group do together, that the members cannot do separately?’. Many such teams, such as Executive Committees of business lines, can create much value by working together, above and beyond what they can achieve separately – for example by integrating effectively across business lines, and aligning on a joint vision. In all these cases, the potential for teaming is very significant.

However, few leadership teams experience their collaboration as peak team performance. Some top teams experience this potential. We have witnessed it as consultants with our client teams. However, many top teams, even a majority in our view, unfortunately only experience a fraction of this possibility, and tend to operate as working groups of individuals rather than teams.

In systemic team coaching, we focus on enabling leadership teams to achieve high-performance, learning agility, and substantial collective impact with their most important stakeholders.

We do this first and foremost by addressing the whole team as our client in coaching (joint driver of learning, and decision maker), while honoring the distinct role and responsibility of the team leader in the success of the team.

We enable the team’s success by integrating and connecting four dimensions of learning:

- Addressing not only **the relational dynamics of the team**, but connecting this with the **joint business goals of the team**, which represent a major unifying focus, and factor of alignment for an effective team.
- Addressing not only **the internal dynamics of the team**, but connecting them with **the external interactions with key stakeholders**. This external orientation enables the team to focus on maximizing its external impact.

As a result, we enable Executive Committees to operate as transformational leadership teams, by practicing 4 disciplines, and finding their best, operational answers to key questions:

- **CO-Learning:** What are the core changes in our environment that our team will need to address? How will we cultivate a dual focus on task and collective process? How will we increase our flexibility of modus operandi as a team? How will we continue to support the

¹ By Executive Team, we mean teams that hold significant decision-making authority, but also high interdependency, typically the Executive Committee of a Business Unit, or the leadership team of a major business function

development of each member, and of our team as a whole? How do we bring a transformational presence individually and collectively when it really matters?

- **CO-Engaging with stakeholders:** Who are our most important stakeholders as a team? What are their most important unmet needs from us? How will we best engage with them as partners? How will we sustain feedback loops with them? How will we jointly manage our key relationships with them?
- **CO-Aligning on joint goals:** What is our shared vision of long-term success? What do we want to achieve together that we cannot achieve separately? What are our joint, short-term, measurable goals? What is our level of commitment to these goals? What are our few joint projects to realize this vision? What is the core mission and role of our team (e.g. orientation, decision, delivery, monitoring, leading change)?
- **CO-Delivering performance:** How will we make decisions together as a team? How will we share and rotate leadership among ourselves? How will we challenge and support each other? How will we focus on the most strategic work that only our team can do? How will we work effectively and creatively together?

These disciplines involve hands-on practices that can be applied to real business issues. They are collective as well as personal. They require sustained practice and application to be mastered.

We help teams master these practices in a way that enables them to move across **four levels of team practice**:

- A. Working group of individuals
- B. Effective team
- C. High-performing team
- D. Transformational leadership team

We find that many top teams (not all) do not fully master the second level of practice (Effective team), but also that most team would benefit strongly from achieving the third or fourth level of practice.

To enable leadership teams to master these practices and achieve high performance, we usually propose a four step approach over time:

1. **'CID': Coaching alliance, Inquiry and Diagnostic:** a series of preparatory meetings to build the coaching relationship, understand the team's priorities and core challenges
2. **Team Alignment Work-out:** a 2-day workshop to take stock of the state of play of the team, set development goals, and acquire core team learning practices
3. **Strategic Projects and Team Partnership:** a second 2-day workshop, focused on aligning on a shared vision, strategic goals, and team projects, while building joint ownership
4. **Team project coaching:** 2 or 3 shorter workshops of 1.5 days, focused on continued practice of high performing teams while working on joint strategic projects: connecting with stakeholders, continuous learning, cocreating performance

We facilitate these steps of team coaching through a **customized sequence** of off-site team workshops, complemented by on-the-job team meetings, coaching sessions, diagnostic interviews. We believe that **the team coaching relationship between the team and the coaches is a key context for learning**. We pay particular attention to establishing an effective learning partnership with the team.

We invite leadership teams to work with us as coaches in the spirit of learning, by working under **7 principles for partnering in coaching**: getting personally involved in the change, and being willing to be challenged; choosing openness and curiosity towards what is new or different, rather than protection or judgement; Daring to speak up, to give feedback, and to talk straight; Accepting to trying out new things before having 100% understanding; Intending mutual support; Being fully present, physically and mentally; Holding confidentiality.

Unique features of this approach

- Focused on the unique, high-stakes context that leadership teams operate in
- Coaching-based approach, ideally suited to personal and collective learning
- Grounded in core business and strategic issues, generates learning opportunities from business projects (not something 'on top of' real business)
- Collaborative learning processes generate breakthrough learning
- Encompasses external stakeholder relations, as well as internal team interactions (avoids excessive internal focus)
- Learning over time to have sustainable impact

Essential benefits enabling transformational impact

- Generating a transformational, shared vision and goals for the business
- Experiencing a deep sense of trust-based partnership in the leadership team
- Mastering essential team learning practices
- Growing personal and relational leadership
- Developing empowered partnership with key groups in the organization, and external stakeholders
- Shaping the culture and system of the organization
- Delivering breakthrough results as a team
- Having transformational impact as a leadership team