Leadership Team Coaching: Reviewing Literature to Inform Practice and Future Research

Keywords: Executive coaching, Team roles, Team learning, Whole brain thinking

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Abstract

This paper’s purpose focused on reviewing selected literature in the areas of team role theory, whole brain thinking and team learning to expand what is known about the emerging practice of leadership team coaching in and for organizations. For each area of literature the origins, definitions and process descriptions were presented and discussed to support the integration of the various concepts and to help map them to the executive and organizational coaching process. The paper concludes with recommendations for HRD practice and future research focused on team leadership coaching.
Leadership Team Coaching: Reviewing Literature To Inform Practice And Future Research

The practice of leadership team coaching is a sub-set of the emerging field of executive and organizational coaching. The explosive interest and growth in the field of coaching over the past decade is one response to major shifts occurring in the world of work characterized by globalization, rapid advances in transportation and communication technology, hyper-competition, expectations of shareholders and financial markets, demanding customers, and changing workforce and consumer demographics (Hamel, 2000; Pietersen, 2002). As a result of these trends the learning demands for leaders today have never been greater, nor have the stakes associated with success or failure.

For example, a report by the business intelligence firm Cutting Edge Information indicated that “70% of CEOs fail as a result of execution errors, rather than errors in strategy” (PRNewswire, 2003; also see Ready & Conger 2003). Evidence such as this, often exacerbated by poor succession planning, drives interest in improving performance through talent management. The Center for Creative Leadership’s 2007 Changing Nature of Leadership reported “talent acquisition and talent development” as the number one challenge facing organizations today and into the future, which ranked ahead of market demands and customer needs, changes in strategy and culture, restructuring and drive for innovation (Martin, 2007).

The American Society of Training and Development reports spending levels for employee learning and development (a key component of talent management) by U.S. organizations exceeded 130 billion in 2007 compared to 109 billion in the prior year (Kranz, 2008). It is within this context that in the U.S. alone, spending levels associated with coaching have been estimated to increase from 1 billion in 2004 to 2.4 billion in 2006, and is projected to

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grow 18 percent annually (LaRosa, 2006; Sherman & Freas, 2004). Increasingly, intent on addressing leadership challenges just-in-time, organizations around the world hire external executive coaches, and use managers and human resource professionals as internal coaches, often as an alternative to executive education and training. While coaching is one of the fastest-growing areas of leadership development, the current state of practice is fragmented, with few barriers to entry. The practice of coaching is ahead of a supporting theory and research basis (CIPD, 2004; Tompson et al, 2008). Coaching’s popularity also brings a pressing need for quality control.

Coaching currently is viewed as one of the top five leadership development best practices (behind experience/field assignments, smart content, action learning, and simulations and pilots). Given its price tag (i.e., $200 to $500/hour), however, it is often reserved for managers and executives (including “high-potentials”) vs. front line employees and individual contributors (WanVeer & Ruthman, 2008). According to *The 2008 Sherpa Executive Coaching Survey*, nearly half of the organizations surveyed make coaching available to managers at all levels (or 46%), while an equal number limit coaching to senior managers and top executives (or 46%). The need to make coaching “scalable” — making a one-on-one, face-to-face delivery mode available to greater numbers of people, at comparable quality, and with higher impact — has drawn the attention of organizational talent management decision makers.

As Marsick and Watkins (1999, p. 9) note, “learning is not an end in itself.” Leaders and their organizations see learning as a means to meeting and exceeding customer requirements, creating and marketing excellent products and services, and fostering the innovative work climates needed to realize competitive advantage. We are particularly interested in understanding whether, and how, team coaching can help leaders and groups of managers learn to respond to
the emerging, complex operating environments that reflect the world of work. We explore this by
drawing on our own research and experience associated with action learning combined with
team learning, and the available literature on team roles, and theories of whole brain thinking.

Problem Statement, Purpose, and Research Questions

Several observers have called for empirical coaching-specific research (e.g., Bennett, 2006; Kilburg, 2000; Skiffington & Zeus, 2003). Feldman and Lankau (2005, p. 830) note that “there have been fewer than 20 studies that have investigated executive coaching with systematic qualitative and/or quantitative methods.” While academic research on coaching has lagged behind the practitioner literature and the actual practice of coaching in organizations, there is evidence of growing interest amongst various scholars. In an extensive annotated bibliography of the behavioral sciences literature Grant (2007) presents an analysis of 69 outcomes studies conducted since 1980 (with only 8 being randomized controlled studies) while tracing the first published peer-reviewed paper on coaching to 1937.

Between 1935 and 1979, Grant identified only 19 peer-review articles compared to 336 (of which 58 were dissertations and 128 were empirical studies) between 1980 to July of 2007, with a majority of the articles being what Grant calls more theory-based “discussion articles.” None of the studies in Grant’s review focused on the topic of leadership team coaching nor did our search using the same databases (i.e., PsycINFO and Dissertation Abstracts International), combined with additional searches using “Google Scholar” and Columbia University Libraries’ e-resources, result in identifying existing leadership team research. These results supported our intuition that there is an opportunity to contribute to the knowledge base of this specialty area of coaching. We believe this work can build on the growing body of coaching research in and for organizations.
The problem this paper seeks to address relates to this lack of team coaching theory and supporting empirical research. Hackman and Wageman’s (2005) “Theory of Team Coaching,” based on selected literature, is a starting point for understanding the first part of the problem statement explored in this paper. Ascentia (2005), a corporate executive coaching firm based in the UK, reported results from a case study of a “group coaching program” that describes an approach focused on multiple managers that goes beyond the more common one-on-one process of executive or managerial coaching. While the Ascentia study reported return on coaching investment rates that ranged from 200 to 600 percent, the theory that informed the group coaching practice and/or the empirical basis for this approach was not reported. This provides an opportunity for further exploration.

The current inquiry was guided by two research questions with the intent of identifying potential theories and research to inform the emerging practice of group-level coaching: (1) *In what ways are executive and organization coaching, team roles, team learning, and thinking styles defined in selected literature, including prior studies?* (Probing Questions: What are the key components of each? What connections are present across the four areas of literature?) (2) In what ways does the available literature: (a) align with results from team learning research (Kasl, Marsick, & Dechant, 2000) and our preliminary work with team roles and thinking styles and (b) provide insights that inform the practice of leadership team coaching in organizations?

**Methodology**

The primary method employed was a selective integrative literature review, a “form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated” (Torraco 2005, p. 356). The co-authors conducted a preliminary review of empirical and research-based
articles generated from the following “key words”: Executive Coaching, Leadership Team Coaching, Team Roles, and Team Learning, Whole Brain Thinking. We sought articles published in academic, refereed journals, as well as books authored by “key thinkers” based on searches in major citation indices. The following research databases were used: ERIC, PsycARTICLES, PsycLIT, Sociological Abstracts and Business Source Plus. We used “Google Scholar” to identify sources in peer-review journals and the popular press (Pan, 2004). The analysis procedures for this review were largely inductive to allow for various conceptual patterns, relationships and themes between the selected areas of literature to be identified and described (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Integrative literature review was selected by the co-authors as the method of choice to ground future research on this topic in “what is known.”

Selected Literature

We summarize our major findings by: (1) providing a brief summary of the various ways four areas of selected literature have been defined (i.e., executive and organizational coaching; team roles, thinking styles, and team learning) from multiple perspectives, (2) listing the major components and related processes of each, (3) making connections between these literature in an integrated manner, and (4) outlining insights gained from this inquiry.

Executive and Organizational Coaching

We begin with a review of executive and organizational coaching to situate our interests in team leadership coaching in a broader context. Since its introduction to the corporate, business, and public sector literatures during the 1980s, the concept of coaching has emerged as a powerful new field in the applied Human Resource Development (HRD) arena (Skiffington & Zeus, 2003). As the field develops we observe many forms of coaching such as coaching education, skills coaching, rehearsal coaching, performance coaching, and self coaching; as well
as a number of areas where coaching is taking place. These forms include *coaching in organizations* (related to management or executive development, enhancing performance, team or group coaching); *business coaching* (executive coaching, including working with small-to-medium enterprises and entrepreneurs, start-ups, and businesses other than large corporations); and *life or personal coaching* (i.e., major life transitions such as career preparation, career change, pre-retirement, after children live home, starting a family, and work-life balance).

*Origins of Coaching*

Coaching has a long, yet fragmented history, and has been around as long as the human race. The practice of professional, more structured and systematic coaching surfaced during the late twentieth century as part of targeted leadership and management development. Early reported accounts of coaching in the workplace tended to focus on tasks and productivity as part of managerial functioning, later to be labeled managerial coaching. According to Grant (2007), the first peer-reviewed coach related article appeared in *Factory Management & Maintenance* reported by C. B. Gorby (1937) about a profit-sharing plan in the Hosking Manufacturing Company, Detroit, Michigan that highlighted “older employees assuming the task of coaching others in the importance of spoiled work” (p. 82) and its positive impact.

Similarly, many other early studies appearing in peer-review articles emphasized coaching as a critical supervisory skill. In time the idea of *coaching* (i.e., a development activity) was combined with *counseling* (i.e., addressing “gaps” in performance or behavioral expectations) as part of the performance management process (e.g., Driver, 1955; Frohman, 1977; Hayden, 1955; Hoppock, 1958; Lewis, 1947). By the 1980s coaching began to be positioned as one of many important management development roles along with *sponsor* and *mentor* (Ponzo, 1980). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s a number of articles focused on the
connection between coaching and a variety of topics including feedback processes (Devikey, 1994; Duffy, 1984); leadership (Popper & Lipshik, 1992; Stowell, 1987), productivity (Sergio, 1987), transfer of training (Sawczuk, 1991), and sales performance (Strayer & Rossett, 1994).

It was also during the 1990s that the term executive coaching began to appear (Diedrich, 1996; Kilburg, 1996; Levinson, 1996), with an emphasis on coaching executives and the individuals delivering coaching services to and for organizations. Today, the state of coaching has reached a point where claims made regarding its effectiveness (e.g., improved productivity, reduced turnover, positive behavioral change, and performance enhancement) need to be supported with additional research. The good news is the number of coach-related articles appearing in peer-reviewed articles has been on the increase with only two reported between 1935 and 1944, 33 between 1985 through 1994, 155 between 1995 to 2004, and an impressive 141 since 2005 to July of 2007 (Grant, 2007). Yet very little has been reported on team leadership coaching.

Rationale for Coaching

In general, the basic rationale for individuals and organizations engaging in executive coaching are three fold (Maltbie & Power, 2005; Tompsoon et al, 2008): (1) to raise performance, (2) to develop high potentials, and (3) to adapt to changes in the external environment. Further, as Maltbie and Power (2005) identify, the intended results of executive coaching found in the literature include individually focused outcomes (i.e., reaching goals, producing desired results/maximizing performance, increasing personal fulfillment, finding meaning in work, increasing life balance, building capability by becoming more competent) and collective outcomes (i.e., clarifying goals and roles, contributing to the organization, delivering business results, producing extraordinary results, having effective conversations across the organization,
improving strategic thinking, facilitating change, retaining high potentials, enhancing innovation, increasing customer loyalty and improving overall leadership effectiveness today and in the future). Further research is needed to substantiate these claims.

Coaching: Distinctions and Definitions

There are nearly as many definitions of coaching as there are practitioners and researchers. One’s assumptions about coaching influences what one pays attention to, and therefore, the practice options included or excluded, and by extension, the results the coach and their clients realize. Conceptual clarity requires differentiating coaching from other helping and development roles, identifying critical features and criteria related to effectiveness in the role, and the core elements of the coaching process.

One challenge in the field is the increasingly blurred boundaries with the related roles of training, consulting, mentoring, counseling, internal HR generalists, and therapy, just to name a few. Yet coaching has been influenced by a number of the same disciplines that inform other helping roles. One distinction that seems relatively clear is between coaching and therapy. Therapists are licensed psychologists who are specifically trained to clinically treat executives with emotional and counter-productive behavioral problems. Therapy tends to focus more on the past to understand the present, whereas coaches work in the present to realize a desired future. Therapists are experts, whereas coaches are partners with clients who refer to therapists if they encounter deeper problems (Skiffington & Zeus, 2003).

The International Coaching Federation (ICF), one of the largest and oldest professional associations in this space, defines coaching on their website as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.” Further, researchers and authors typically define executive coaching as
“a short- to medium-term relationship between an executive and a consultant with the purpose of improving an executive's work effectiveness” (Feldman & Lankau, 2005 p. 829). Similarly, the Graduate School Alliance of Executive Coaching Programs (GSAEC) — an organization with a mission of establishing and maintaining standards for education and training provided by academic institutions for the discipline of coaching in organizations — on its website defines executive and organizational coaching as “a development process that builds a leader’s capabilities to achieve professional and organizational goals.”

Maltbia and Power (2005) summarize five key themes that emerged when reviewing the various ways the concept is defined in the literature, including executive coaching as (1) a process, (2) a partnership, (3) a balance between individual and organizational needs, (4) a way of working, and (5) the new face of leadership for the 21st century. Executive coaching as a process, specifically a motivational process, involves an intimate, one-on-one relationship between a senior organizational leader (or high potential) and a coach, generally external to the organization. However, there is increased interest in the role of an internal professional coach (Frish, M. H., 2001). According to a recent survey conducted by the Institute of Executive Development (IED), 16 percent of organizations, and growing, rely on internal coaches.

Coaching processes are designed to unlock the client’s potential by setting clear goals, creating action plans, seeing the future with strength and optimism, and reflecting on the outcomes of one’s actions to learn and take informed future action. The primary activity of the coaching relationship is dialog about client’s values and beliefs, performance issues related to effective leadership, plans and action taken. Executive coaching helps organizational leaders build their capacity to lead, as well as coach within their organizations to “spark learning and build the capabilities needed to succeed” (Hargrove, 2000, p. 5).
We see one way of building such a capacity is through the emerging specialty area of leadership team coaching. Simply stated, team coaching refers to the “process of a single coach working with a team of leaders” (Frankovlglia & Martineau, 2006 p. 379). Leadership team coaching has been defined as leadership coaching in a group setting with the intention to establish a foundation of trust, develop the capacity to constructively resolve conflict, and build greater commitment and accountability amongst its members in order to achieve better results for the organization (Kets de Vries, 2005).

Coaching Components and Process Overview

After exploring the “where,” “when,” “what,” and “why” of executive coaching embedded in the history of the coaching movement, an analysis of the “how” of the executive coaching process was conducted. The processes described in the literature ranged from three to ten steps (or phases), with the most common being a five step process (e.g., Diedrich, 1996; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Kilburg, 1996). These steps were similar to those outlined in a study conducted by The Corporate Leadership Council in 2000 that included 18 companies (e.g., American Express, Citicorp, Goldman Sachs, IBM, Proctor & Gamble and Unilever): (1) assessment, (2) data analysis and development planning (3) execution of development plan, (4) continuous coaching support and (5) the final coaching session.

A closer look at each step reveals that most coaching processes included several, related sub-categories for each, or coaching tasks, demonstrating both the comprehensive and complex nature of the process. To address this inherent complexity, we used Terence Jackson’s (1991) theoretical construct of the Science of Human Performance as an organizing heuristic to integrate the various steps and related sub-categories found in the executive and organizational coaching literature into a comprehensive whole, or visual representation of the process. Jackson’s
framework states that understanding any form of human performance, and related interactions, is a function of the *context* (i.e., a structuralism and constructivist philosophical orientation), *content* (i.e., phenomenology), and *conduct* (i.e., behaviorism)—each posing an essential question (see inner ring of Figure 1 below).

Figure 1.

*Coaching Process Framework*

The resulting coaching process is also theoretically grounded in an expanded version of the classic action research model as described in the adult learning and organizational development literatures (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Burke, 2002 - see outer ring of Figure 1). Two components were added to the classic 7-step action research approach: (1) the emergence of emotional, social and cultural awareness (or developmental frames) and (2) our desire to make learning explicit by intentionally focusing on growth and renewal. Table 1 displays short descriptions of the three components that align with each of phase of the coaching process. Table
2 provides three coaching tasks associated with each coaching component by phase, again, informed theoretically by the classic action research process (see the ICF’s website to see how our framework aligns with their 11 core coaching competencies). Our interest is to understand how this executive coaching process might apply to, and inform, team leadership coaching.

Table 1.

Coaching Process (Phases and Component Descriptions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTEXT</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>CONDUCT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry and Contracting (Trigger/Framing the Situation)</td>
<td>Feedback (Giving and Receiving)</td>
<td>Action Strategies (Experimentation &amp; Pilots)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectively establish the client - coach - customer alliance, understand the client's context (e.g., roles &amp; other organizational factors/ personal influences) and set expectations for working together.</td>
<td>Leverage the power of feedback's potential to facilitate learning and change throughout the coaching process by examining the past, present and future.</td>
<td>Foster continuous and transformative forms of learning to prompt clients to operate outside of their comfort zone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Frames (Mental Models/Worldview)</td>
<td>Exploring (Options, Payoffs/Consequences)</td>
<td>Growth &amp; Renewal (Strategic Insight)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess the client’s emotional intelligence, social intelligence and cultural competence to understand how each impacts the client’s perceptions.</td>
<td>Here the focus shifts to helping clients discover and articulate a picture of their wants, needs, aspirations, and potential outcomes associated with each path.</td>
<td>Continue to help clients make explicit their path of personal growth by integrating informal and incidental forms of learning with strategic learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation Analysis (Data Collection &amp; Synthesis)</td>
<td>Planning (Priorities &amp; Goals)</td>
<td>Execution (Reflection-in-Action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage clients to tell their personal story and work to expand their awareness of the presenting situation by exploring stories from a variety of perspectives and sources.</td>
<td>Now clients focus on the most important factors that will translate talk to action, and then translate action to results (i.e., realizing aspirations).</td>
<td>Putting it all together by supporting clients in their transition from experimentation to full implementation (i.e., &quot;walk-the-talk&quot; matching words with results).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on our integration of various concepts found in select literature, a comprehensive framework of the executive and organizational coaching process seems to include what we have labeled as three coaching foundations:

1. Guiding principles for coaching effectiveness — i.e., they act like a “compass” to help keep the coach connected to the client and the coaching process on track, which include codes of ethical conduct that many professional coaching associations have defined for their membership (e.g., focus on client’s agenda and build commitment through involvement);
(2) **Core coaching competencies** — i.e., aggregates of capabilities that when applied across the entire coaching process create synergy and sustainable client value in a range of applications – aligns with the concept found in the OD literature, “self-as-instrument” and includes establishing the coaching agreement, estimating trust and intimacy, questioning, listening and clarifying focus, for example (see Maltbia & Power, 2005);

(3) **Coaching process** — i.e., phases, components, and related coaching tasks outlined in this section of our literature review that focuses on individual and organizational change, growth, and renewal, or the “map”.

Table 2.

**Coaching Process (Components and Tasks)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTEXT</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>CONDUCT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entry and Contracting (ICF #1-3)</strong></td>
<td>Feedback (ICF #5-8)</td>
<td>Action Strategies (ICF #8-9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Inquiring</em> about the nature of the presenting problem, trigger event, challenge or opportunity</td>
<td><em>Inviting</em> clients to pay attention to observational feedback</td>
<td><em>Helping</em> clients discover opportunities for ongoing learning (sessions/work/life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Surfacing</em> hopes and concerns</td>
<td><em>Urging</em> clients to summarize and interpret</td>
<td><em>Combining</em> challenge with support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Clarifying</em> expectations about the parameters of the coaching process</td>
<td><em>Facilitating</em> the examination of hunches about potential disparities</td>
<td><em>Celebrating</em> client’s successes and capabilities for continued growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developmental Frames (ICF #4, 8)</strong></td>
<td>Exploring (ICF #5-9)</td>
<td>Growth &amp; Renewal (ICF #9-11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Clarifying</em> client’s relationship to self and to others</td>
<td><em>Asking</em> provocative questions to stimulate imaginative thinking about the future</td>
<td><em>Creating</em> opportunities for clients to conduct honest, ongoing self-appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Determining</em> emotional &amp; social capacities (strengths &amp; limitations)</td>
<td><em>Practicing</em> “feed-forward” with various options to help clients illuminate possible futures</td>
<td><em>Translating</em> insights about strengths and limitations to focused &amp; aligned commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Building</em> the client’s capability for growth and change</td>
<td><em>Prompting</em> clients to consider potential benefits and costs of options before taking action</td>
<td><em>Findings</em> ways to promote self-renewal (e.g., work-life balance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation Analysis (ICF #5-6 &amp; 8)</strong></td>
<td>Planning (ICF #10)</td>
<td>Execution (ICF #11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Engaging</em> clients in the identifying questions to focus data collection and feedback</td>
<td><em>Stimulating</em> clients to integrate insights and define focus</td>
<td><em>Holding</em> client’s attention on what’s important by following up on commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Co-creating</em> data collection strategies to determine what information is needed</td>
<td><em>Collaborating</em> with clients to create a coaching plan and SMART goals, while attending to emergent goals.</td>
<td><em>Building</em> client’s capacity to recognize “teachable moments”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Working</em> with clients to diagnose the situation</td>
<td><em>Reaffirming</em> client’s agenda (align goals with personal values &amp; organizational priorities)</td>
<td><em>Modeling</em> flexibility and adaptation by moving back and forth (e.g., “big picture” focus &amp; making daily adjustments)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the next three sections, we briefly describe concepts drawn from selected literature in the areas of team roles, whole brain thinking, and team learning, with the intent to transform the executive and organizational process, which largely assumes a one-on-one developmental relationship, to a group-based process.

**Team Roles**

Building on Meredith Belbin’s (1981) team role theory, here we review the origins of the team roles concept, present sample descriptions and related process components, and importantly explore potential application to the executive and organizational coaching process in the context of leadership teams.

*Origins of Team Roles Theory*

The idea of team roles is not new. Partington and Harris (1999) review team role models dating back to 1948 when Benne and Sheats proposed the following three: (1) "harmoniser," (2) "initiator-contributor," and (3) "energiser." Throughout the years researchers have created frameworks that included between 2 and 12 critical team roles. The concept of team roles has its roots in the broad field of OD (e.g., Hackman & Wageman, 2005). Team roles are one of four core dimensions that drive team performance, along with goals, processes (e.g., communication, problem solving, decision making, and managing conflict), and relationships (Beckhard & Partchard, 1992).

Belbin’s (1981) seminal research has resulted in one of the most extensively used methods for identifying team roles, i.e. the “Team-Role-Self-Perception Inventory (TRSPI)—based on nearly a decade of experimentation with combinations of various personality and behavioural types as part of an executive development programme. He trained observers who identified eight team roles, and developed an instrument for quantifying individuals’ team role
preferences based on his empirical work. He argued that the more the team displays "a spread of personal attributes, laying the foundation for different team role capabilities" (Belbin, 1981, p. 90), or what is termed team balance, the greater the propensity for it to be high performing. A common critique of this theory, and its supporting inventory, is that most of the psychometric properties have been collected based on large samples of individuals vs. teams, which clearly raises an important area for future research. Our colleague, Michael Morris, Columbia Business School, has adapted and updated this assessment for research now underway with project teams of 2nd year MBA students to address this gap.

**Definition and Role Descriptions**

Belbin (1981) defined team roles as “a tendency to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way” (p. 62). Building on the work of Benne and Sheats (1948), Bales (1950) defined team roles in terms of *task-oriented* and *socio-emotional functioning* or group maintenance roles (Partington & Harris, 1999).

**Team Role Component and Related Processes**

While not without critique, Belbin’s ideas relating team roles and team effectiveness have been widely used by many UK organizations, consulting firms, and more recently, executive education programs in the United States. The current business context has contributed to strong interest in linking team roles and team performance. Chang (2007) discussed the growing evidence for the link between *team role balance* and *team performance* (Senior, 1997); *role balance* and *successful project teams* (Watkins and Gibson-Sweet, 1997); and division of team roles into either ‘task’ or ‘relationship’ orientation as a basis to predict team harmony and productivity (Fisher et al., 1998).
Table 3 displays the modified version of Belbin’s inventory, along with the Columbia Team Roles Inventory (C-TRI), with a list of descriptors that reflect “enablers” and “barriers” to team effectiveness associated with each. The C-TRI is a self-assessment (paper-based or electronic) that includes seven sentence stems, each with eight options. Respondents distribute a total of 10 points among the various team behaviors. Individual profiles include a primary role, a back-up role, and one’s least preferred role. Bruce Tuckman’s (1965) classic group development stages of *forming*, *storming*, *norming*, and *performing* has become a foundational concept for understanding how groups come together and structure their work. Michael Morris has linked team roles results and group development phases to create a very practical way to visually display the influence one’s individual and collective team role preferences can have on the group’s performance. We see this tool as having application for diagnostic work during the early phases of the coaching process, as displayed in Tables 1 and 2, when applied to leadership teams.

**Table 3.**

**Team Roles Inventory (C-TRI)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE</th>
<th>ENABLERS</th>
<th>BARRIERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idea Generator</td>
<td>Creative, imaginative, unorthodox. Solves difficult problems.</td>
<td>Ignores incidentals. Too pre-occupied with own thoughts to communicate effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conductor</td>
<td>Mature, confident. Clarifies goals. Brings other people together to promote team discussions.</td>
<td>Can be seen as manipulative. Offloads personal work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Advocate</td>
<td>Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure and unstructured challenges. Has the drive and courage to overcome obstacles.</td>
<td>Prone to provocation. Liable to offend others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbiter</td>
<td>Serious minded, analytic and discerning. Sees all options. Judges accurately.</td>
<td>Can lack drive and ability to inspire others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus Builder</td>
<td>Cooperative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic. Listens, builds, averts friction.</td>
<td>Indecisive in crunch situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementer</td>
<td>Disciplined, reliable, conservative in habits. A capacity for taking practical steps and actions.</td>
<td>Somewhat inflexible. Slow to respond to new possibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checker</td>
<td>Painstaking, conscientious, anxious. Searches out errors and omissions. Delivers on time.</td>
<td>Inclined to worry unduly. Reluctant to let others into own job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To support interpretation, the eight team roles can be further arranged into three clusters: (1) *action* (i.e., change advocate, implementer, and checker), (2) *social* (i.e., conductor, resource seeker, and consensus builder), and (3) *thinking* (i.e., idea generator and arbiter). At the individual level, having insight into roles that energize can be useful for making informed choices about how to engage with other team members and contribute to the team’s goals. At the team level, plotting each team member’s role preferences on the same map provides a visual picture of the role distribution and degree of balance across roles, which allows the team to devise strategies for addressing any coverage gaps that may exist, and to explore the implications of various team roles for leveraging capabilities to drive performance.

Team role profile results can provide insight into member personal tendencies and preferences when coaches work with a leadership team, as well as, how the coach can use individual and team role profiles to inform intervention choices during each phase of the coaching process (i.e., context, content, and conduct). From the perspective of the coach, the C-TRI profile can provide insight regarding member tendencies, energy level, and focus – as such, the team role preferences tool provides a foundation to expand the coaching process presented in Figure 1 from the individual to the group level of human resource development work.

*Whole Brain Thinking* (Styles)

The review of team roles theory has made clear that effective group functioning involves *thinking* (i.e., goals, roles), *acting* (i.e., work processes), and *being* (relating and emotions); in this section we briefly explore whole brain theory informed by recent developments in the neurosciences (Rock & Schwartz, 2006) and make additional connections to the leadership team coaching process.
Origins of Whole Brain Thinking

Brain theory dates back to 400 BC when Hippocrates discovered that the “brain of man is double” and that each side has different functions. Since that time we’ve learned a great deal about the brain’s functioning. Examples include Philip Vogel and Joseph Bogen’s “split-brain” surgery on epileptic patients in the 1960s which involved severing the ‘corpus callosum’ that connects the two halves of the brain; to Roger Sperry’s 1981 Nobel Prize winning research on split brain patients furthering our understanding of the brain’s hemispheres and how they control different aspects of both thought and action. Ned Herrmann, Jacquelin Wonder, Priscila Donovan, Beverley Moore, and Kobus Neethling are among key brain dominance researchers (McAdams, 2002).

Meaning of Whole Brain Thinking and Key Component

In essence whole brain thinking is the pattern that results from the interaction between the cerebral (i.e., our conscience high-road) and limbic (i.e., our lower, more unconscious) hemispheres of the brain. It is argued that when use our “whole” brain, we expand our capacity for logic, intuition, analytical problem solving, reasoning, and artistic ability, which in turn, can contribute to increased personal and professional productivity, performance, and satisfaction.

Brain profiles developed by Kobus Neethling are measures of one’s thinking preferences across four quadrants including: (1) cerebral left (or L1: What? Facts, meticulous, logical and analytical), (2) cerebral right (or R1: Why? Future, big picture focused, pioneering, and intuitive), (3) limbic left (or L2: How? Form, methodical, organized and task-driven), and (4) limbic right (or R2: Who? Feeling, considerate, expressive, and interpersonal). In reviewing this work, we see opportunities to further explore potential empirical connections between thinking preferences and team role preferences to inform more collaborative forms of work demanded in
21st century organizations, and importantly to expand our understanding of the coaching process from the individual to group/team level.

**Team Learning**

Lastly, given that we see coaching at its core as a learning and change process, we briefly explore connections between what we’ve discovered about team learning and make potential connections to the leadership team coaching process. We rely primarily on the team learning model developed by Kasl, Marsick, and Dechant (1997). Other scholars of team learning have included Senge (1990) and Edmonson (2002).

**Origins of Team Learning**

The notion that teams learn was central to action learning as proposed by Reg Revans from the United Kingdom. The idea of team learning became popular in human resource development when Senge (1990) included team learning among five disciplines of a learning organization. The foundation for understanding learning at the group level lies in group dynamics—e.g., differentiating between task and interpersonal interaction behaviors looking at functional and dysfunctional group behaviors, and understanding how stages of group formation affect performance often embodied in Tuckman’s (1965) classic work. Kasl, Marsick, and Dechant (2000) argue that an understanding of group dynamics is necessary, but not sufficient, for the facilitation of *collective learning* in groups. Groups learn when key members of the group have a shared understanding and/or set of capabilities. Teams are a subset of groups with common goals, practices, tasks, and processes. Groups consist of sub-groups that may not share a common goal or ways of reaching it.
Team Learning Defined

Senge (1990) defines team learning as one of five learning disciplines—the “process of aligning and developing the capacities of a team to create the results its members truly desire” (p. 236). Kasl, Marsick, and Dechant (2000) define team learning as a “process through which a group creates knowledge for its members, for itself as a system, and for others” (p. 255). Edmonson (2002, p. 128) — who researched group and team learning in healthcare and businesses — underscores the “local, interpersonal, and varietgated” nature of learning in groups that is greatly affected by power and perceptions of risk.

Senge suggests that the discipline of team learning starts with dialogue, the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine “thinking together.” The intent of dialogue is to view situations from multiple perspectives, and to foster possibility thinking through questioning and other forms of inquiry. In contrast, discussion is a convergent process where statements trigger analytic thinking and judgment. Given our interests in leadership team coaching, part of the work of expanding our executive and organizational framework to a group setting is to be explicit about conversational protocols. It also seems important to clarify the distinction between dialogue and discussion, and their respective roles in the leadership team coaching process.

A Team Learning Model: Processes, Conditions and Modes

The Team-Learning Model outlined here identifies a set of research-based processes and conditions that collectively result in three potential team learning modes that can be assessed by the Team Learning Survey (Kasl, Marsick & Dechant, 1997). First, the five learning processes include: (1) framing (i.e., group’s initial perception of the presenting problem, challenge or opportunity, and can include situations, people or objects); (2) reframing (i.e., process of
transforming the initial frame often through various structured conversation protocols, see Maltbia & Marsick, 2008); (3) *experimenting* (group action taken to test hypotheses, or various actions, or to discover and assess their impact); (4) *crossing boundaries* (i.e., members seek or give information, views, and ideas through interaction with other individuals or units—barriers can be physical, mental, or organizational); and (5) *integrating perspectives* (i.e., members synthesize divergent views such that apparent conflicts are resolved through dialectical thinking, not compromise or majority rule). These processes provide yet another layer for the coach to apply when working with teams through the phases of the coaching process (e.g., how various team members frame and reframe their context, the content of their work, and their conduct while striving to achieve individual and team goals).

The model also describes learning conditions that include: (1) *appreciation of teamwork* (i.e., the openness of members to hearing and considering others’ ideas, the degree to which members value playing a team role, and the extent to which they act in ways that help build on the potential synergy of its member’s talents); (2) *individual expression* (i.e., the extent to which members have opportunities to give input in forming the team’s mission and goals, influence the team’s operating processes, and express concerns and objections); and (3) *operating principles* (i.e., the extent to which the group has structured itself for effective and efficient operation; established a set of commonly held beliefs, values, and purpose; and balances working tasks and building relationships). These ideal team learning conditions further clarify Beckhard and Pritchard’s (1992) team effectiveness dimensions (i.e., goals, roles, processes, and relationships). The Dechant-Marsick Team Learning Survey (email maude@execomboard.com for details) is a measure of the team’s progress for each dimension. When combined with the team learning processes, these conditions provide the coach with a learning perspective on group dynamics.
Lastly, team learning is a dynamic process in which both learning processes and the conditions that support them change qualitatively as the team adapts various ways of functioning. Teams can move developmentally from the fragmented learning stage (where individuals learn separately, i.e., the team does not learn as a holistic system) to potentially the pooled learning stage (i.e., individuals begin to share information and perspectives in the interest of group efficiency and/or effectiveness; here small clusters of groups learn, yet still not the team as a whole). When teams reach the synergistic learning stage, members create new knowledge and mutually divergent perspectives are integrated through dialectical processes that create shared meaning schemes. The major contribution of the Team Learning Model (Kasl, Marsick, & Dechant, 2000) to our understanding of Leadership Team Coaching is that it provides a developmental perspective to the executive and organizational coaching process, while presenting a framework for assisting coaches to devise strategies for helping members with different team role preferences and thinking styles to gain a picture of their level of functioning as a team that learns (i.e., fragmented, pooled and synergistic) and co-create ways to improve both team efficiency and overall effectiveness.

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations for Practice and Further Research

This review of literature will inform our future research focused on building a comprehensive theory of team leadership coaching informed by empirical evidence. We will begin by using data generated within the new Columbia Coach Certification program, using a sample of coaches engaged in this program in 2008-2009. Specific insights from this literature review that will inform this research include:

- Because definitions of coaching are so varied, we will use the Coaching Process Framework (see Figure 1 and Table 1) and the related Coaching Components and Tasks (see Table 2) that grow out of this integrated review of selected literature to guide
research that can examine a relatively uniform set of leadership team coaching practices across different context.

- Team roles theory will be one area of focus in our research. We will collect data on team role preferences using the C-TRI. Given the emerging research interests in Belbin’s (1981) work, and its extension by Morris at the Columbia Business School, we will collect data to better understand potential connections between team roles and team leadership coaching practices.

- We will also explore possible interactions between team role preference patterns and whole brain thinking preferences, as measured by Kobus Neethling’s NBI (Neethling Brain Inventory). Specifically, we will examine the results of various analyses from data collected using the C-TRI and The Neethling Brain Inventory to explore the potential interactions between role preferences and thinking preferences as the basis for better understanding team member interactions and to inform team leadership coaching practices. Early potential connections we will test, based on content analysis, are: L1 and conductor and arbiter roles; R1 and idea generator and change advocate roles; L2 and implementer and checker roles; and R2 and resources seeker and consensus builder roles. Interaction patterns derived from an analysis of data for each participant using these two assessments should yield implications for refining the team leadership coaching process and related practices.

- The team learning processes, conditions, and developmental stages will be assessed using a validated Team Learning Survey so that we can look for possible differences in the ability of teams to learn in relationship to team roles and brain thinking patterns. Although this research will be exploratory, we will look for possible differences in the quality and productivity of team coaching based on mix of these capabilities in teams.

We conclude the paper with specific recommendations for the field of human resource development (HRD):
• Given that executive coaching is fast becoming one of the top leadership development interventions to grow talent in organizations, there is an opportunity for coaching in general, and team leadership coaching in particular, to be informed by HRD research, so we recommend that practitioners be encouraged to forge partnerships with academics to better integrate theory and practice opportunities.

• We encourage practitioners to use our preliminary findings to explore ways to increase the application of coaching beyond one-on-one executive coaching to teams and groups to make coaching more readily available to more leaders within the organization at a lower overall cost (i.e., scalability).

• In addition, we recommend expanding the scope of coaching to include a leadership team component given the impact senior executives has on both the culture and climate of the organization (informed by assessment work such as the NBI, C-Tri, and TLS).

• Group and organizational learning processes develops capability in different ways than individual focused development (including executive coaching) given that teams provide a context for perspective taking and making often tacit and implicit assumptions about organizational life and functioning more explicit and operational.

References


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