# The Challenge for Coaching in the 21st Century


## Peter Hawkins

*This paper looks at the future challenges for Executive Leadership and how this requires Coaching to move from what has made it successful in the last 30 years to what will be necessary in the next 50 years. This includes: the need for a new paradigm where the coach sees the coachee not as a client but as a partner, with both parties facing the needs of the wider system; creating a transformational shift in the coaching conversation; linking coaching to a wider coaching culture strategy; and the further development of systemic team coaching.*



**Keywords**

transformational coaching, systemic team coaching, coaching culture, new paradigm coaching, coach supervision


## The Context

Henley Business School
Corporate learning survey 2014

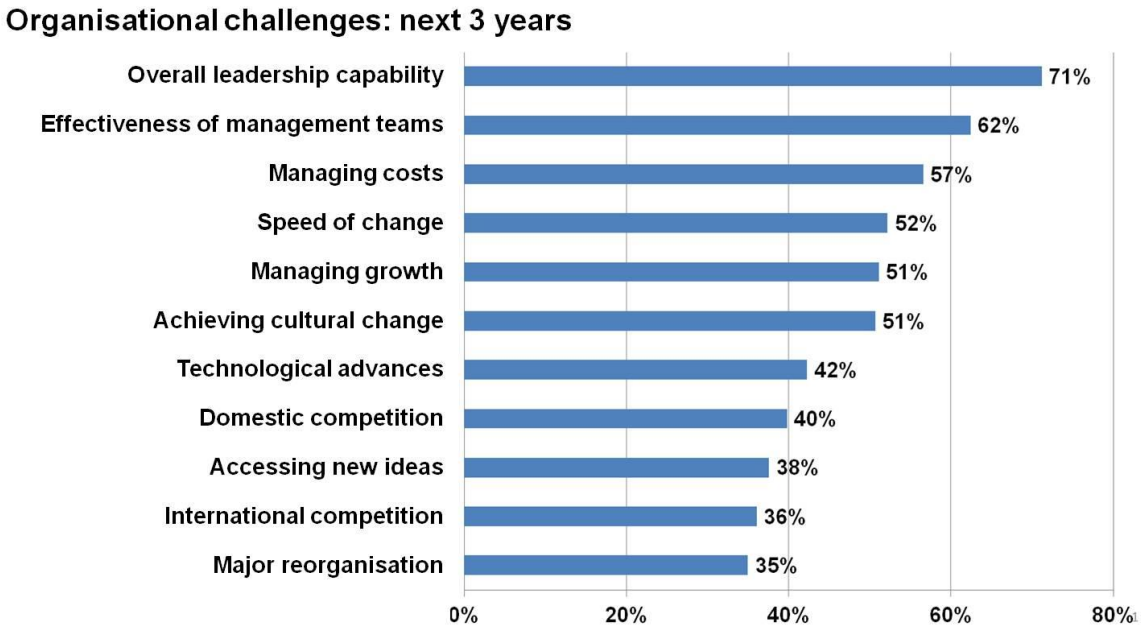



Figure 1

The Coaching industry/profession has had a meteoric rise over the last 35 years and now is a sizeable market estimated to be worth over $1.5 Billion dollars worldwide. In a recent survey by Henley Business School (Henley 2014) when asked what they saw as the biggest challenge for their company in the next three years, the highest quoted challenge was "Overall Leadership Capability", identified by 71% of the respondents.

When asked what they as a company were going to be doing in 2014 to respond to this challenge, the highest response was "Individual Coaching" (83%) and the second highest was "Team Coaching" (55%).

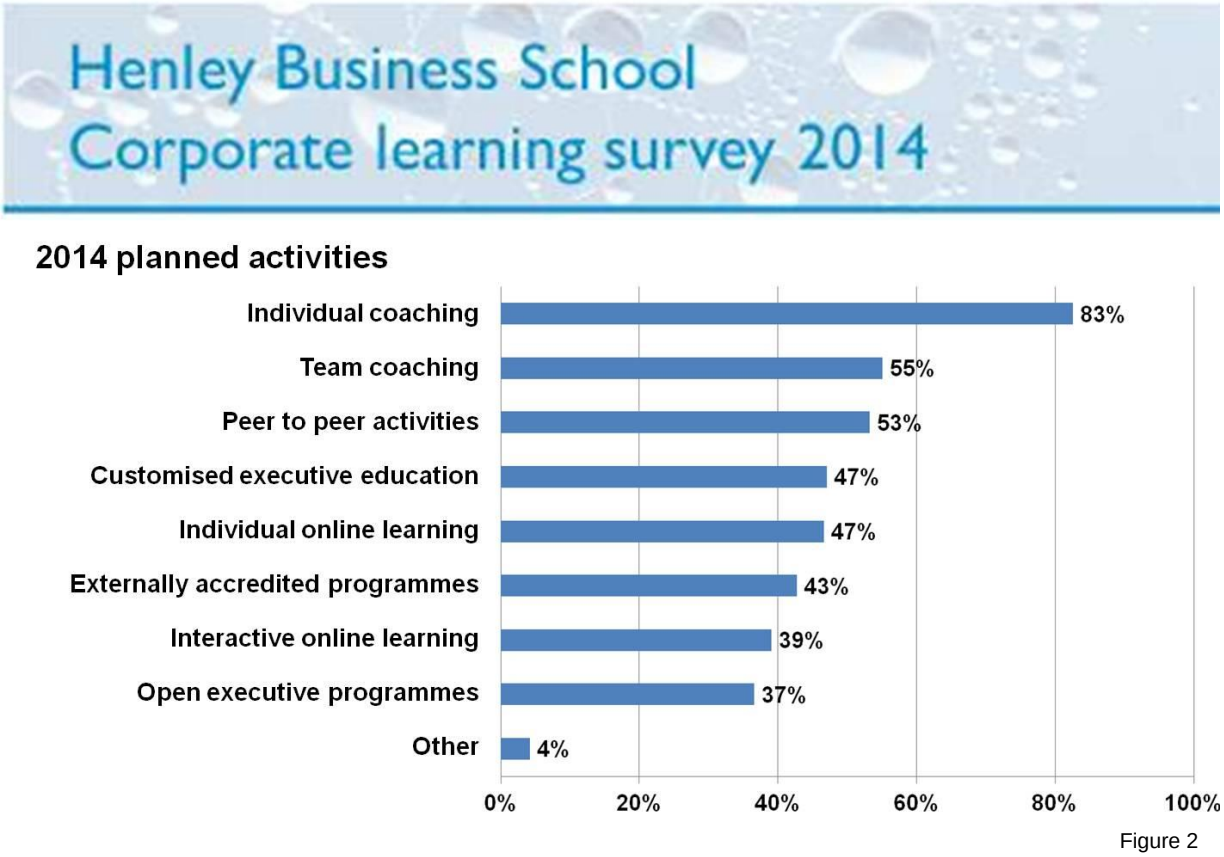



Figure 2

Coaching has also achieved a great deal through this period of its expansion, in its international spread in the breadth of its use and in its professionalisation (Lane et al 2014). However, in this paper I will argue that what has helped coaching have such a phenomenal rise in popularity will not be sufficient for it to continue to flourish in the next thirty five years. To plagiarise the title of Marshall Goldsmith's (2007) book on leadership: "What got us to here, will not get us to there!"

## The Future Challenges

The 21st century has been characterised as the world becoming increasingly V.U.C.A.: that is volatile, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous. I often describe the unholy trinity that every organisation faces as the challenge "to do more, at higher quality with less resource." This is a global phenomenon. The world's population has trebled in my own lifetime from 2.4 Billion in 1950 to the current 7.2 Billion and is predicted to rise to between 9 and 10 Billion by 2050. This is unprecedented since the dawn of our species. At the same time the speed and spread of the internet and mobile telephony and the media have made us more instantaneously interconnected than ever before. This means that we have accelerated the rise of expectations of people's needs and consumption even faster than the rate of population growth. The rest

now know what the best already have and want to catch up. The combination of the rise in population and of human consumption means that we are already using more of the Earth's resources per year than the earth produces and so we are constantly using up our natural capital and leaving a legacy of a less resourced Earth. Hence the unholy trinity of: doing more, at higher quality with less resource, is not a product of a short term economic recession but rather a long term species-wide challenge.

The level of complexity that needs to be embraced by all organisational leaders has accelerated faster than leadership has developed its capability to deal with this enormous challenge. Many organisations now report that the gap in leadership capacity required for the future is their number one challenge, as shown in Figure 1, above (Henley Corporate Survey 2014).

## Coaching, leader development and leadership development

One of the biggest areas of coaching provision is as part of the wider leadership development industry, in which over $14bn worldwide was spent on leadership development in last four years. Despite this, only one in three leaders value the development they receive, and only 18% of HR specialists feel that their companies have the quality/quantity of leaders needed to run the firm in three to five years. (Boatman and Wellins 2011).

Elsewhere (Hawkins 2014a and 2014b) I have argued that the era of the heroic individual leader is over and we need much higher levels of collective leadership and more effective leadership teams. Yet most development and indeed coaching is focussed on leader development not leadership development.

For coaching to be successful in the 21st century and for coaching to make a valuable contribution to the growing challenges for the Earth, the human species, organisations and organisational leaders, I would suggest that it needs a quantum step change that includes four important areas that future coaching needs to address:

- A new paradigm of coaching, less focussed on the personal development of the individual and more on what the future and the individual's stakeholders need different from the individual.
- Transformational coaching that goes beyond insight and good intentions to creating a shift in patterns of feeling and core assumptions of the coachee and embodied learning.
- The further development of systemic team coaching that helps teams at all levels to collectively transform how they create value for their stakeholders.
- The further development of coaching cultures in organisations that turn individual and team learning into organisational and systemic learning and stakeholder value creation.

I will now address these four important areas for the development of coaching going forward.

## The new paradigm in Coaching.

For coaching to step up to the very different world of the 21st century and continue to make an impactful contribution, it needs to radically reconsider the questions: "Who or what does Coaching serve?" I would argue that the inter-connected challenges facing the world require the human species to learn and develop faster than can be achieved one person at a time. One of the foundations of coaching, that of individual client centred development, is now one of its major limiting beliefs. Coaching has enabled much individual growth and development but this is now insufficient at best and at worst becomes a narcissistic enterprise.

Recently I was working with the City of Cape Town on how it is developing a coaching culture.

Cape Town: Restaurant and Market

**Figure 3: Developing a culture of coaching in the city of Cape Town**

We had sixty people in the room and were exploring the tremendous efforts the City has made to develop different types of coaching in its organisations. I set up a number of people to be the stakeholders of the City's local government. These included: Service users; Tax payers; Employees from the City including - Senior Executives; Middle Managers; and front-line workers; and a few people representing the collective grandchildren, those who will inherit the long-term consequences of the decisions that are made today.

At regular intervals I would stop the exploration of the presentation on the coaching culture and ask for

feedback from the stakeholders. At the first round of comments, the person representing the front-line workers said:

> *"The senior executives already have the big salaries, the best offices; the best travel arrangements and now they are the ones getting the coaching. To me it sounds like coaching is another privilege for the over-privileged. What is your coaching-culture doing for me?"*

This led to a very useful exploration of how the limited number of internal coaches could use some of their time coaching project teams, that were drawn from all levels of the work-force, as well as including stakeholders. These project teams would address the future cross-functional challenges for the City and region of Cape Town.

Even in coaching sessions for individual executives there should never be just two people's concerns present. A new paradigm is needed where the coach should not be a supplier focussing on the individual needs of the coachee as their customer. Rather, the coach should go shoulder to shoulder with the coachee, both facing the needs of the coachee's stakeholders, including: the coachee's direct and indirect reports, their colleagues and fellow team members, the people they report to, their investors, customers, suppliers, the communities in which they operate and the more-than-human world whose resources support us daily.

Coaching is not done by the coach alone but is a joint enterprise, involving multiple stakeholders.

## Transformational Coaching

Having been involved in the development and growth of Coaching Supervision, the faculty of the Bath Consultancy Group International Coaching Supervision Training (http://www.cstdbath.co.uk/certificate-in-supervision), we reviewed in 2005 some of the oft-repeating patterns in supervising coaches. We discovered that the most common pattern was for coaches to come to supervision and report that they had a great coaching session where that had been an "aha moment" of insight, and this had led to the coachee planning how they would act differently back at work. The coach would then express their frustration that the coachee came back a month later and had failed to follow through on their planned action. What was most interesting and also worrying was that the coaches would frequently blame the client: "they clearly were not committed"; "they allowed other events to overcome their important intentions".

We explored how supervision could help coaches turn the spotlight back on what the coach and coaching could do differently to interrupt this frustration loop. We were reminded of the old saying: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions". We were convinced that insight and good intentions framed as an action plan, although often an important part of coaching, were insufficient by themselves to create effective change. From studying writings in the emergent area of neuroscience applied to coaching and leadership (Brown, P and Brown, V. (2012), Hall and Duval (2004); Lewis et al (2000), we realised that transformational change is characterised by a complex and integrated set of processes in the human brain and nervous system. These processes link cognition with physical action. Or, as we like to frame this, they are embodied.

If as coaches we stop at the point of insight and good intention, we have not done what is necessary to support effective change. We need to help the coaching move the learning from the intellectual centre to become embodied learning. The most effective way we have discovered to do this, is to create embodied

experiments and “fast-forward rehearsals” live in the coaching session. Once the coachee has planned to have a different meeting with a key individual and agreed **what** they need to address and **when** they will do it, we move beyond them **explaining how** they are going to do this, to **showing how** they will do it differently through rehearsing the future meeting live in the session. This change in our coaching and in the coaching of the many coaches we have trained and supervised has led to a large increase in the percentage of planned change that actually happens.

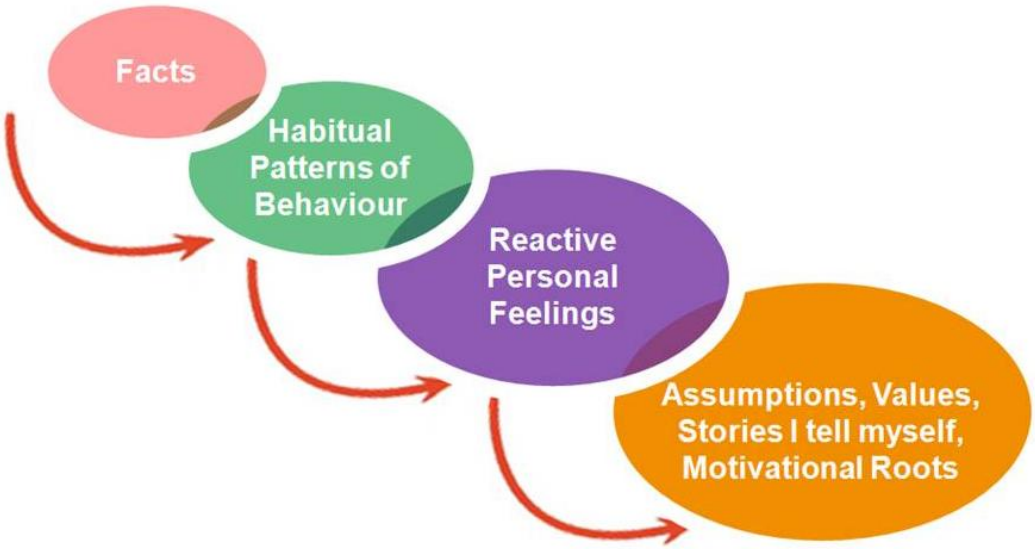
We have defined Transformational Coaching as being:

> *“in service of transforming our fundamental assumptions, core beliefs and motivations that drive our emotional and behavioural patterns, so we can increase our capacity to respond to the challenges that life is constantly providing.*
>
> *by focussing on:*
>
> - *Working in partnership in service of the world beyond the direct client*
> - *Attending to four levels of engagement (see Figure 1 below)*
> - *Listening beyond the story to the frame, patterns and assumptions*
> - *Moving beyond insight and good intention to an embodied shift in being – using fast forward rehearsals*
> - *Unlearning as well as learning*
> - *Working systemically – realising the shift needs to start in the relationship in the room.”*

(Hawkins and Smith 2014: 228-243)

Our model on four levels of engagement helps coaches reflect on how much of their coaching they spend focussing on the facts, or even on the behaviours, and how much on exploring the emotional patterns and core assumptions that create the story we are telling ourselves and the behaviours we manifest.

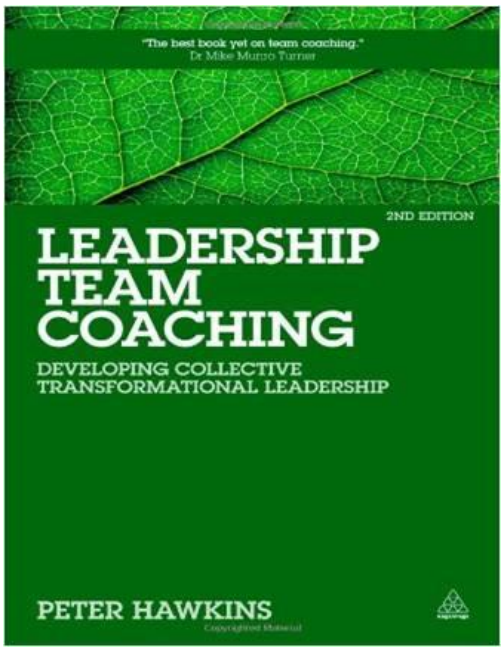
**Figure 4: The four levels of engagement:**




## Systemic Team Coaching

One of the fastest growing areas in coaching is systemic team coaching (Hawkins 2011, 2014a and 2014b), a new craft that is a hybrid of the best of coaching and the best of organisational development. This growth is partly driven by greater awareness that the complexity of modern organisational life has increased to a

level where individual leadership is no longer the answer (Ryder 2011) and that there is a much greater need for collective leadership. However, too often leadership teams function at less than the sum of their parts. The research on leadership teams shows that while traditional team building that focuses on internal team functioning and interpersonal relationships may be partially helpful, it does not by itself create high performing teams (Wageman 2001, Wageman et al. 2008 and Katzenbach and Smith 1993a and 1993b). Much more emphasis needs to be focussed on how the team collectively engages with its commissioners and its multiple stakeholders (Hawkins 2014a and 2014b).




In Hawkins (2014a: 80) I defined *systemic team coaching* as:

> *'a process by which a team coach works with a whole team, both when they are together and when they are apart, in order to help them improve both their collective performance and how they work together, and also how they develop their collective leadership to more effectively engage with all their key stakeholder groups to jointly transform the wider business'.*

In Hawkins (2014b), there are many case studies that show the journey of many different teams and how they develop to create better measurable value for their stakeholders assisted by systemic team coaching, often delivered jointly by the systemic team coach and the internal team leader.

## Creating a Coaching Culture

I met with a senior Human Resources Director who proudly told me how they had a strong panel of external coaches, developed and trained a community of internal coaches, and had trained many of their managers with coaching skills. I told her I was impressed and then asked her how many coaching conversations did she think took place every week in her organisation? She replied, there must be thousands worldwide. I then asked her how her organisation learnt from those thousands of coaching conversations. She looked shocked and had no answer. Many people confuse a coaching culture to mean an organisation where a lot of coaching takes place. These two are not the same thing. For a coaching culture is not just about coaching inputs, but also about the alignment of these inputs to create individual, team, organisation and wider system value creating change.

In 2012 I defined a Coaching Culture as:

> *"A coaching culture exists in an organisation when a coaching approach is a key aspect of how the leaders, managers and staff engage and develop all their people and engage their stakeholders, in ways that create increased individual, team and organisational performance and shared value for all stakeholders."*

(Hawkins 2012:21)

Too often coaching can be seen as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end. For an organisation to really benefit from coaching it needs to develop a coaching strategy that starts with the end in mind. This needs to begin with the organisation's strategy, based on its understanding of how its current and future stakeholders need to develop to create greater value for all stakeholders. This strategic understanding can then address how the organisation's culture, and within that its leadership culture, needs to be different to deliver this strategic development. Only then can it address the question: "How can coaching most effectively assist this necessary cultural development?

No longer is it enough for coaches just to deliver coaching that is valued by the individual coachee. Coaching needs also to deliver organisational learning and development and value to the coachee's stakeholders as well as eventually to the organisation's stakeholders. Coaching needs to have a much stronger systemic orientation (Hawkins 2014 and Hawkins 2011b). This means practically that coaches are coaching more than two people in the same organisation. Therefore, they should ensure there is some mechanism for feeding back some of the cultural patterns that they discover which go beyond personal and interpersonal dynamics, while preserving the appropriate confidentiality. Organisations, like the one mentioned above that have a great deal of coaching activity, should establish mechanisms for harvesting the organisational learning (Hawkins 2012:99-103).

## Conclusion

Success as a company or a profession has many dangers. These include complacency, which can in turn become arrogance. It may also induce less motivation to change and adapt and a failure to notice that the ecological niche in which you operate is changing faster than you are. The business literature is full of cases where so-called excellent companies who were leaders in their market, failed to adapt and their success fell off a cliff. If you are number one in your sector, you can be slower than less successful companies to notice and respond to critical changes in the wider marketplace. By the time the impact of these changes is evidenced through a decline in financial performance, it is too late. Olivetti were market leaders in typewriters; IBM in mainframe computers; Kodak in print photography; Tesco in supermarket retail. Yet all were blinded by their success and failed to see the changes in their wider ecology. If you are a market dominator you need to be actively listening to and engaging with your wider stakeholder ecology to create the market that is needed for tomorrow.

Coaching has been very successful but is in danger of being blinded by its success and can often be too much focussed on the past and on internal agenda. I wrote about the future challenges for coaching in 2008 (Hawkins 2008) and since then these challenges have both changed and grown. Coaching, that has now become a global profession, needs to "lean into the future" (Scharmer and Kaufman 2013) and discover "What it can uniquely do that the world of tomorrow needs." (Hawkins 2005). I hope that this article has made a small contribution to that large endeavour.

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