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Author's foreword: what this book can do

I wrote the first edition of this book out of a desire to share with other group and team coaches the group analytic insights into the 'secret life of groups' that had enriched my practice with teams and groups over 20 years. Fifteen years on, I am honoured and humbled still to receive so many messages from you about its value. I hope that this updated third edition, with its new chapter about working online, and improved organisation and crossreferencing, will continue to provide a supple springboard for new thoughts and insights into the 'secret lives' of the teams and groups with whom we have the privilege to work.

The book's aim is paradoxical: to explain complex ideas about group dynamics in terms clear and simple enough to provide a tool of value to coaches and allied professionals. It:

- Explores the various kinds of group and team coaching
- Explains the interpersonal processes underpinning group dynamics
- Offers practical guidance about 'how to do group and team coaching in organisations'.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are the 'must-read' section of the book, laying out the 'secret life' and demystifying the elemental processes of group dynamics. The book is designed to be easy to navigate. As well as the contents page, an FAQ list and a detailed index, there is a fuller description of each chapter at its start, as well as in Chapter 1. The book is also extensively cross-referenced. Though the focus is on working with groups in organisational and business contexts, the ideas can be applied to all other kinds of coaching groups.

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For coaches the book offers new insights, information to illuminate practice and practical guidance to be weighed against your own experience. Using the principles described in this book requires you to think rigorously about the purpose, context and membership of each group with whom you work; doing so enables you to craft, with each group, appropriate methodologies, depth and frankness of engagement.

Leaders in organisations might use the book in an additional way. Only 30% of organisational change programmes succeed[1]. This book sheds light on why. It offers insights to help you choose between competing proposals, through a fuller understanding of how team and group interventions actually work, and what outcomes it is realistic to expect.

The first edition of *Group and Team Coaching* was the first book about group coaching including teams. The book reflects my own fundamentally pluralistic stance, deriving value from the ideas of different, even apparently contradictory, traditions. In my subsequent book, *The Art and Science of Working Together* (2019), I develop further my own ideas about team coaching, and 20 talented professionals extend the plurality of the vision with their chapters. It is a useful companion volume to this book, particularly for those whose focus is work with intact teams.

Christine Thornton
October 2024

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Foreword to the second edition

Now the time for *Group and Team Coaching* has arrived. Individual coaching has had a profound impact on organizations and their leaders and managers over the last 35 years. But the challenges are now changing. The task would be great if we were just facing climate change or population explosion or technological interconnectedness or the exhaustion of accessible primary resources or the extinction of species at a rate 1,000 times greater than ever before; but we are not. We are facing a world where all these challenges and more are happening in a systemically complex web of interconnecting forces.

> The challenge… cannot be addressed satisfactorily by individual expert scientists, or by teams of scientists drawn from the same discipline, not even by multidisciplinary teams of scientists drawn from the finest institutions in the world. It certainly cannot be solved by politicians, even with a greater level of cross border cooperation than has ever existed, nor by pressure groups focusing on one aspect of the complex pattern. The current world challenges task us as a species to find a way of working together, across disciplines and borders, beyond local and self-interest in a way that has never been attained before.[2]

At all levels of human organization we need a new ethic of collaboration, for the challenges of our time cannot be solved by heroic leaders, nor by leadership teams that are dysfunctional or even mediocre. Too few teams function at more than the sum of their parts and our times call for teams that not only relate and collaborate well internally when they are together but can also collaborate with those above, below and to the side of them in the organization as well as all their key stake holders. These challenges will drive the increasing acceleration of the need for team

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coaching, which in turn needs better training and guidance for the team coaches of tomorrow. To this end Christine Thornton in her second edition has made an important contribution.

Much has happened in the field since Christine wrote her first edition. There has been further academic research from Hackman, Katzenbach, Peters and Carr, and West.[3] There has been a growth in 'pracademic' books that combine theory and practice and offer models, processes, tools and case studies for group and team coaching, such as my own two books, Kets de Vries's two books and Britton's volume.[4]

Strong rapid growth and popularity in team coaching was reported in 2013 in global surveys such as the Sherpa and Ridler reports, and in the 2014 Henley Corporate Learning Survey.

Christine's book has made an important contribution to this new and rapidly growing field. She brings together three important root strands of this field and valuably integrates them. These are: the field of Analytical groups, both as established by Bion and developed by the Tavistock, and established by Foulkes and developed by the Institute of Group Analysis; the American field of human systems as developed by Lewin, Argyris and Schön and the National Training Laboratories; and the field of Action Learning and syndicate Learning as developed by Revans, Pedler and others.

Christine also provides thoughtful guidance to practitioners offering traps to be avoided and tips on how best to avoid them. Because so many coaches are addicted to always being in search of new tools for their toolkit, I was particularly struck by her guidance to group and team coaches on the use of tools:

> In coaching teams, all tools require an artisan, or perhaps at times an artist. It may be good to have a well-loaded toolbox, but this is not simply a process of attending as many seminars as possible on new approaches. Acquiring new tools can become a preoccupation at the expense of learning to wield the ones we already own with masterly skill, as all artisans must. In the end it is our judgement and our experience-honed instincts that lead us to pick up a particular instrument.
>
> (Chapter 6)

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Christine goes on to offer sage advice for how best to use tools and what tools are best suited to different presenting issues and situations. She shows us how being a group or team coach requires not only a thorough training to develop the discipline needed to practice the art and craft of group and team coaching, but also a lifetime's personal development and reflective practice to develop the holding presence combined with the humility to step back and enable the team or group to do their own work.

In the next thirty-five years the world of work and indeed the human species need the work of those who can combine and integrate coaching at the individual, team, organization and wider system levels, including how the human species can evolve its consciousness in a new relationship with the 'more than human world' in which it is inextricably nested. Christine Thornton has provided us with one of the guidebooks we will need for this great work.

Peter Hawkins
Barrow Castle, Bath
August 2015

Professor Peter Hawkins, Professor of Leadership at Henley Business School, Emeritus Chair of Bath Consultancy Group, Chairman of Renewal Associates, Systemic Team Coach and Author.

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Foreword to the first edition

This book comes at a pivotal stage, as coaching emerges as a profession, rapidly becoming one of the most accepted ways to accelerate people and business performance. While coaching started off as an intervention to facilitate a manager's or leader's individual learning and development, it is now being used to drive organizational change and transformation.

At the heart of this change comes a greater understanding for coaches and those involved in driving the organization's learning agenda to be open to new perspectives in getting maximum returns from both their current and future talent. We need to look beyond conventional coaching and learning methods (i.e. 1:1 development, 'content-led' training), and tap into the wisdom of groups. It seems we are only at the brink of what this can generate. This book contributes to that change at many levels.

The timing is right for *Group and Team Coaching*. It is the first book to cover this growing and important area of coaching to the depth that the author, Christine Thornton, shares with us. Her experience as a coach practitioner, as well as someone well educated in the areas of group analysis and systems theory, certainly shines through here. Throughout the pages, she strikes a nice balance between what informs group coaching – the bedrock, if you will – and practical, real-world examples from her twenty-five years' experience in this field.

The coaching profession needs a book like this to appreciate where group and team coaching has evolved from (like many forms of coaching, from many disciplines) and to put a 'stake in the ground' at this stage of our evolutionary growth. It offers ideas for others to learn from, to be inspired by, and apply in practice so this very important area of coaching

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will advance, thereby enabling coaches, groups and organizations to reap the wider benefits.

On a broader scale, group or team coaching, as a catalyst for drawing out co-learning and collective group wisdom, can, in Christine's own words, 'foster feelings of connection and common purpose'. She notes that 'if people feel more connected to a larger, worthwhile undertaking, they work harder and stay longer because they feel good about themselves and their place in the company, and in the world'.

If we have more of that in the workplace, and in our lives, there is no doubt that this not only will produce new sources of energy for greater people and business performance, but can be the key for breaking down barriers that inhibit change. It can act as a new source for answers during challenging times, and generate new possibilities and direction – in turn, helping to transform organizations and, one can only hope, society.

Katherine Tulpa
CEO and Co-founder, Association for Coaching
2010

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Acknowledgements to the third edition

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