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Systemic Team Coaching
Case Study re Rocela

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Executive Summary

Rocela, a technology SME founded in 2001 had by 2010, grown to a 60 employee, £29 million turnover business.
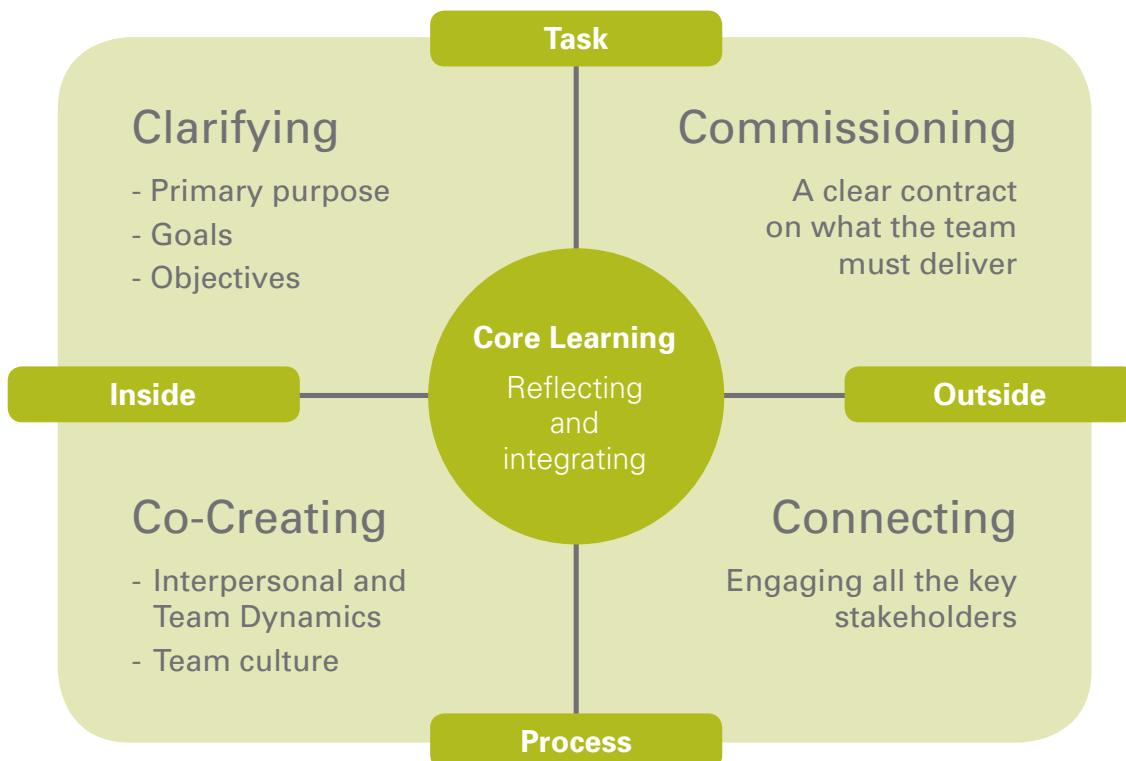
A new executive team was established by the CEO and COO in late 2010. With the historical overview possible as founders of the business, they were aware that a shadow side of past success was that whilst it was natural to continue with the business approach that delivered this success, experience was now showing this was not enabling further business transformation and expansion.

Team coaching was commissioned to support the executive team in working more strategically to transform the business, whilst at the same time maintaining delivery.

Systemic Team Coaching - Model

Systemic team coaching requires that the (legitimate) needs of all stakeholders in the system be taken into account. As we worked with the Rocela executive team we explicitly used Hawkins' (2011) "5C" systemic model of team coaching:

- Commissioning — What does the team exist to do?
- Clarifying — Roles, Strategy, Purpose etc. to deliver the Commission
- Co-Creating — Does the team dynamic support delivery?
- Connecting — Is the team effectively working with all its stakeholders?
- Co-Learning — Is the team continually learning and using its learning?

Task

Clarifying
- Primary purpose
- Goals
- Objectives

Commissioning
A clear contract on what the team must deliver

Inside

Core Learning
Reflecting and integrating

Outside

Co-Creating
- Interpersonal and Team Dynamics
- Team culture

Connecting
Engaging all the key stakeholders

Process

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Equal emphasis is placed on all five domains. Focusing purely on inter-personal relationships and team dynamics (as team development almost inevitably does) promises much but often does not deliver in terms of improved business performance or change.

Five team-coaching meetings were held between December 2011 and November 2012. Between meetings, the Rocela executive team progressed fieldwork they felt was important.

Design of the meetings evolved to suit the emerging needs of the team as we progressed through the inquiry phase to co-diagnosis, then re-contracting (based upon the co-diagnosis) for further work.

A lot could happen between sessions and we evolved the overall coaching process to suit, for example joining team meetings in advance of team-coaching meetings, so that our design process could take account of the most up-to-date business context.

Key components of systemic team-coaching with Rocela were:

- External perspective from stakeholder feedback
- Live-action feedback from us as coaches
- Creative action methods to develop wider awareness of the business and system
- Clarifying important "structural" elements e.g. the team's purpose
- Coaching the connections (e.g. team to stakeholders) as well as the individual parts
- Open, exploratory dialogue
- Support and challenge from us as coaches

Systemic Team Coaching – Overall Approach

Systemic team coaching starts with questions and a deliberate process of co-inquiry to uncover what work will be most useful for the team.

This can be the most challenging part of the process for both clients and coaches. Clients need solutions for problems, and coaches can respond to this pressure by reverting to traditional expert-style consulting. This seems to offer re-assurance that the coach, the team leader, the sponsor(s) or others, know what is needed and know what the team needs to do differently. In our experience however, this tends to lead to rushed treatment of symptoms rather than addressing underlying causes. In addition, there tends to be highly variable levels of commitment from team members for implementing solutions that they had no part in creating.

Given the above, care and attention are needed at the beginning of the engagement, for the high quality conversations needed to clarify expectations, uncover assumptions and develop an explicit contract for how the team and coaches are going to work together. The views of stakeholders in the system also need to be taken into account in the early stages (including definition of work-scope).

The following work was completed in Rocela before we met for the first team-coaching meeting:

- Initial meetings with the CEO and COO in their multiple roles as executive team members, business founders and initial sponsors of the work
- 1-1 meetings with all team members to introduce ourselves and the team coaching approach

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- We joined a team meeting as observers
- Started the process of gathering stakeholder feedback (from customers and staff) re perceptions of the leadership team and the business
- We joined a team meeting as observers

Throughout this time, we were deliberately positioning ourselves as co-inquirers with team members. For example, whilst we continuously offered live action feedback to the team throughout the whole engagement, we did not at any stage offer a (supposedly) definitive diagnosis re team strengths and weaknesses. We wanted the team's full involvement in and commitment to such a diagnosis.

What is Team Coaching Actually Like?

The following phrases give a flavour of what the process felt like overall:

- Emerging clarity (contrasting with initial uncertainty)
- Hard work
- Energy and increasing commitment
- Lots of laughs
- Some deep breaths and challenging moments
- Enjoyment for team members in being a part of making something work even better

Feedback can be summarized by the verbatim comment at the end of the 4th meeting:

" *The best management development work we've ever been on* .

Leadership Team Key Learning and Outcomes

- The team's purpose changed from meeting for "business as usual", reporting and up-dates to a focus on working "on the business" to bring about business transformation
- The team committed to quality face-to-face team meetings to support this purpose
- Improved team dynamic. More open relationships enabling more open and purposeful business conversations
- Underlying causes identified e.g. incentive schemes that were acting as a brake on business investment for future delivery
- Heightened awareness and improved decision making process
- Developed a new business strategy with commitment from the whole team
- Clarified and implemented a new business structure and roles to deliver the new strategy
- Higher quality "collective thinking" in the team
- Awareness of the importance of having access to powerful external voices to support and challenge thinking

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