

HEIKKI TOIVANEN

THE ART OF TEAMING



From Hierarchy to the Team Learning Community

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The Art of Teaming
From Hierarchy to the Team Learning Community

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Acknowledgement

I am used to achieving things on time and with precision – I previously worked for the global paper machinery company Valmet in their paper machine operations for some 10 years. Valmet is renowned for its punctual and precise project work. This book project progressed in a completely reverse way. So much has happened in my life: I have been financially trapped in three different apartments, my businesses have had all kinds of joyful challenges or opportunities, and along with my wife we rebuilt a house originally built in 1902, with a sauna building in the garden, located on the Pispala ridge in Finland's third largest city, Tampere. In addition, I was succumbed to handle the repair work related to water damage at the local Dance Factory in Tampere. I also became a full-time father also coped with the extremely sad passing away of my little sister. Furthermore, I have had all kinds of other issues to manage, such as writing this book which has provided me with moments of pleasure. My life has been divided into eight different action areas, which have been too much. Therefore, completing this book was a significant challenge that I set for myself and achieved.

This book project began just as the corona virus arrived, and it was completed at the beginning of 2025. Personally, I realised the true value and importance of the book during the international Team Coach Boost in September of 2024. One participant asked me how they could start team learning. I got to work immediately and translated three pages of the book using Google's translator, and despite the imperfect translation they were truly grateful.

I am a Doctor of Industrial Economics and a Master of Workshop Engineering by qualification, and according to my own empirical observations, many educational institutions are managed like a functional engineering workshop. It is viewed that teachers and students are similar to production goods on the production line of learning. You are not encouraged to think with your own brain. If thinking were freed, better learning outcomes could be achieved in a cost-effective way. This is why the message of this book is: Person's own individual thinking must be liberated.

Thank you, Mr. Timo Lehtonen, for pushing me to finish this book by helping with the layout, illustration and printing. You are perhaps the most experienced and productive Team Coach in the world. Thank you, my dear wife Irina, and my dear son Hugo, for giving me the time and space to write a book in the midst of all the events and issues. Thank you Sirkka-Liisa Heinonen for persistent language revision with a dyslexic person. Thank you for the comments and support of the book, e.g. Juha Wirekoski, Niina Palmunen, Teppo Kettula, Olli-Pekka Heinonen, Chris Jackson and Milla Kinnunen. A big thank you to the founder of Team Academy, State Counsellor of Education Johannes Partanen – I am privileged to be able to work with you for better learning.

Pispala, Tampere, Finland 4.6.2025

Heikki Toivanen, Dr. Sc. (Tech.)

I. The team as a learning tool

Our customers were on the verge of bellowing at my colleague and I in unison:

"We do everything ourselves. Enough is enough! What do you coaches actually do?"

Internally, I was very satisfied: the customer was realising the essentials of team coaching and coaching leadership. The learner is the customer, who must understand they are to take responsibility for their own learning.

Outwardly, the situation seemed very problematic when it came to the entire extended management team of the organisation, which is some twenty persons. Disgruntled customers may not be satisfied, even if they learn. I managed to calm the situation down by promising a little more structure for the next day. In team coaching, the customer creates their own structure around the themes they have raised. Team coaches only create a safe space for dialogue and experimentation. Now, in my haste, I promised to bring themes for the following day, while the customer was fully engaged in their own hierarchical leadership.

It was an overnight training session which finally ended up in the sauna. Purposefully, our days are long and include informal learning in agritourism companies. At least it happened tonight, I mused. In retrospect, I wondered if the decision was the correct one – should I have let the customer solve the situation themselves? On the other hand, I needed to create a safe environment, and I succeeded in that. I remembered the words of Brené Brown:

If you're comfortable, I'm not teaching and you're not learning. It's going to get uncomfortable in here and that's okay. It's normal and it's part of the process."

On the second day, the atmosphere was more sympathetic, but I am not sure if the participants are learning the correct things. It was a six-month process training, after which I admitted to the external client that I had not fully succeeded in this process. In spite of this, or precisely because of it, the client wanted to continue working with us. The client was actually satisfied with the learning process.

The customers also wanted to move away from the hierarchical management model. The model was developed during industrialisation in the early 1900s. At that time, only management had the knowledge needed for leadership, and only they had sufficient training for leadership. Nowadays, information is available to everyone. The artificial intelligence will make the knowledge available for everyone. Now, the employees of work communities are as educated or even more educated than managers. The hierarchical

management model needs to be abandoned, and decision-making must be transferred to the members of the work community. Decision-making must take place in teams. Teams are the decision-making unit of future work communities.

I am a mechanical engineer by training. For the first fifteen years of my career, I worked in industry. And for the past fifteen years, I have coached work companies. I find it confusing how they have copied operating models from machine shops. Many communities are still run today just as Henry Ford ran his automobile factory in the early 1900s. In many companies, leadership is based on hierarchy and orders.

Unlearning the hierarchical leadership model does not mean chaos. This structure is pyramid-like, and the decision-making power lies with leaders. In the team-learning leadership model, the decision-making power sits with teams, in that it is structurally flat and thus equal. First, of course, the team and community must be of the right size to function: a maximum of 20-25 teachers or experts and 200-300 students. In a larger unit, people no longer know each other. The team of the community of experts should also be of the same size. One supervisor is able to lead and coach two teams. When the work community grows to the size of more than 25 employees, a new unit and team must be established.

I have read in several sources that a unit of 200-300 people is the maximum size for a community where everyone knows each other. My own observations support this. In Oulu in Finland, the Ritaharju School was built on this principle. The school has about 1400 pupils, but the school consists of a separate five units. Each unit with 200-300 pupils and about 25 teachers operate quite autonomously under the leadership of a team coach or a pair of team coaches. The management of Ritaharju School also works on the principle of pair management – the principal and the assistant principal run the school together. The correct structure is the starting point for building a culture of team learning.

In a team learning community, regular dialogue, i.e. genuine discussion, must be maximised. It is at the heart of the leadership model. Dialogue requires a lot of time, which is why teams need to reserve several hours a week for it. The third point is the common goal, i.e. a shared vision. A clear goal and rules for a team-learning work community must emerge from the work community. These form the structure of the work community. Moving from a hierarchical leadership model towards the power of teams enables team learning. In the same way, the teacher must relinquish their own power and transfer the responsibility for learning to the learners. It requires talent to build a team learning culture. When the learners and the team have responsibility, the team coach, i.e. the leader or teacher, must be careful about the correct type of learning culture.

The formation of the team and the development of its shared vision required leadership and team coaching. This is the reason behind the name of this book: The Art of Teaming. The Finnish translation of Teaming is Tiimistyminen which is a newly created word in the Finnish vernacular, which was developed during the process of book writing? In my own thoughts, the teaming means "A managed process of team formation, where learning, leadership, a shared vision of the team and the autonomy of the team are combined". In my opinion, team building is "team building that originates from the team, takes place without leadership and without a shared vision".

To create the correct kind of learning culture, you require:

- 1) The correct team and community size.
- 2) Regular sessions of dialogue.
- 3) Shared vision.
- 4) Interdependence of the team.

Team building requires team coaching expertise. A team needs a team coach who develops its self-management, or in fact, co-management. Team members guide and lead the team together. A team can also have a coaching leader, i.e. a team leader, just like a sports team has a coach and a captain. In a team, the individual learns faster than working individually, because the team acts as a learning mirror of the individual.

Team learning is considered to probably be the oldest form of learning among humans. Around campfires, deep in the past, hunter-gatherers would have shared their thoughts about the previous day's hunt and planned tactics for the next day's hunt. They learned co-operation through hunting and discussing their hunting. Back in those days no written information existed. Today, the amount of information is so vast that it is beyond the control of individuals. Different people have the necessary knowledge which when combined makes great wisdom in the team.

Greek philosophers developed a deeper word for campfire discussion which is dialogue. The word dialogue comprises of two Greek words dia and logos, which mean through, and the act of speaking, thus in total meaning through the act of speaking. The participants in a dialogue do not choose a side but think together with others. The dialogue and learner-based learning method of team learning is based on the fact that the team is a tool for individual learning. The team becomes a community of trust from which the learner receives feedback from their peers. An active learner acquires new skills and knowledge in interaction with team members, by reading theoretical information for their own needs and by experimenting with what they have learned. Team learning is a holistic learning method that combines action, feelings, sensory perceptions, bodily experiences, thinking together, reading and recording one's own goals. In a team, an individual learns many times faster and more efficiently than alone.

This book has varying perspectives, theories and stories that will provide you with inspiration for teamwork. Teamwork and learning exist in the middle ground between so many different human sciences that there is no single theory. Creative entrepreneurs of the modern era, such as Grace Beverley from England or Perttu Pölönen from Finland, are prime examples of this. They have the admirable courage of people in their young mid '20s to share a solid personal view of entrepreneurship, learning or the future. Their books are read by millions. Solid academic research, on the other hand, is often slow and cautious, and it does not provide a grip or help for the future. This book is based on my personal views, experienced theories and experiences. Team learning has been tested for more than thirty years, which means the slate is already well chalked.

We at Team Academy Global Ltd. (Tiimiakatemia Global Oy) have coached more than 2 000 team coaches in long-term coaching, with the method being applied in more than 20 countries.

In this book, I use the term team coach. A team coach has their own team or teams that they individually coach. A team coach can be a trainer, teacher, leader, director, manager, supervisor, expert, entrepreneur or even a coach. Ever increasingly, I meet people who are simply called team coaches. I use the term learner for the team member itself, because the focus of this book is to view the team as a tool for learning.

The second chapter of the book discusses team learning, and why a culture that learns as a team is required. The third chapter dives into the principles of team learning. The fourth chapter discusses what it means to be a team coach and a coaching leader. The fifth chapter highlights the importance of building a team culture. The sixth chapter examines the team's development stages and learning journey, because team coaches must understand the greater picture of teamwork. The seventh chapter discusses the challenges and dark sides of teamwork that a team must go through in order to develop. In the last chapter of the book, I reflect on the character of a team coach, because each of us is different and we must act through our own strengths. We refer to this as the team coach's character, i.e. the strengths of nature.

It is my belief that the terms team and the coach are the most misused terms that exist today. It would be more suitable to use the terms group and trainer respectively. A team differs from a group in that the team has a shared vision, a common agreed goal. The team meets regularly. The team is a suitable size. A group is a group of people who are aware of each other. The coach starts with the needs of the learner and is aware of the necessary relating information. The trainer only starts with the information that the learners may need. If in a "learning situation" the "coach" has more than 20 percent of the voice, he or she is a trainer, and it is a training event. The team can be used as a tool for organisation, as a tool for learning, or as a combination of these. When the team is used as a tool for learning, it is team learning. The team coach guides the learning process of the team.

The team has a separate team leader and team coach. The team leader, i.e. the leader of the team, is responsible for the team's operational activities and management. The team coach coaches the team. In much the same way as in sports, there is a team captain, i.e. a team leader, and a team coach, i.e. a coach for the team.

It is my belief that educational institution is a gloomy term. I have observed that renewal unfortunately often occurs either in terms of the structure of the building(s) or the finances. Buildings are erected that are excessively large, resulting in the educational establishment becoming a faceless school machine where learning is taylorised. Let us imagine that when teacher-led information is fed into the learner's head, learning would occur. It is now time for educational institutions to renew themselves and transform into communities of collaborative learning, i.e. team learning.

The same type of need for renewal exists in companies and other communities. Leadership must be reformed to meet the demands of new generations for equality and respectful leadership.

There are three key elements to a team learning community:

1. A shared vision, structure and operating culture of the entire community.
2. Functional teams, i.e. teams of a suitable size (maximum of about 25 people).
3. Communal or team learning, dialogue and learning by doing.

The most important feature in the background is trust. It is essential to create a safe atmosphere where mistakes can be made and rightly forgiven. Trust is born from openness and interest in other people. This book is aimed at reformers and learning leaders in work communities. The idea of the book is to offer practical thoughts and stories based on theory and my own empirical observations on how to transform a rigid organisation into a learning community. Finnish communities have already boldly embarked on the path to renewal. In this book, I share my own views, stories I have heard and personal experiences in the first person. In them, I combine my own memoirs, theories and teachings – some may even be misguided, or my accuracy in recalling the anecdote is lacking. The title of Henrik von Wright's (2002) memorial work, "My Life as I Remember It", should describe the veracity of these stories and theories. As a wise philosopher, von Wright ingeniously transfers the responsibility for understanding the book to the listener.

Once, a book-wise person who visited us at the Team Academy said: "This worked in practice, but how does it work in theory?"

2. Towards team-learning work communities

Team Academy - A pioneer in learning

Peter Senge, a renowned developer of learning organisations, visited Team Academy in the 1990s and was amazed and he remarked: "The first true learning organisation in the world. Why are there so few of these?" I have heard and read this anecdote multiple times. I would have liked to have been involved back then, but I hadn't entered the team Academy arena by then. I was actually in Japan at the time. The establishing of the Finnish university of applied sciences system was also a distant thing for me. Johannes Partanen was looking to move from teaching, although his passion for learning was by no means waning. Above all, Johannes wanted to renew learning, and in his own words he misunderstood the idea behind the University of Applied Sciences. Much to the disappointment of Johannes, Universities of Applied Sciences became traditional bachelor's universities that implemented outdated pedagogy. His idea was to combine learning and business. His thoughts on this form of business model were modified, but Johannes thought that classroom number 147 would be similar to his own company and he would run it as if it were his own. Then both of his careers as a teacher and as an entrepreneur would be in symbiosis. The story goes something like the following: Johannes Partanen created a handwritten A4 advertisement and put it on the school bulletin board which read:

"Do you want to go on a trip around the world and learn a little about marketing on the side? Come to classroom 147 on 19th January 1993 at 15.00."

Upon the door to the classroom the following notice was placed:

"Be careful not to walk in, because your face will be grinning for the rest of your life!"

As many as 24 enthusiastic students expressed their willingness to enrol. Thus, on the 19th of January 1993, the first student team aptly labelled the "Round the Word Team" (RTW), was born. To the horror of the cleaners, all the desks were carried from the downstairs classroom of the school at Rajakatu 37 in Jyväskylä, Finland, to the corridor and people began to sit in a circle in comfortable armchairs like Native Americans around a campfire. In the early stages of the operation, Johannes brought the values that guided it to the students. These formed the values of the Team Academy. The values were learning by doing, practicality, continuous experimentation, continuous creation of new things, learning and travelling. The mission was to eliminate unemployment. The

This Art of Teaming book offers a practical and inspiring journey towards building team-oriented communities. This book questions the traditional hierarchical management approach and reveals a new culture where teams are at the core of learning and decision-making.

This book has been written for:

- Team coaches and leaders that want to strengthen their skills in coaching leadership.
- Developers of organisations and builders of learning communities.
- Everyone that is looking for new approaches in creating meaningful and inclusive work environments.

Doctor of Science (Technology), Heikki Toivanen, is a fully experienced team coach and the CEO of Tiimiakatemia Global Ltd.. Heikki skilfully combines a decade of experiences, inspiring anecdotes and profound theories. The reader is invited to challenge their own mindset and be encouraged to move towards a learning culture where learning, effective dialogue and a shared vision are at the core of the experience.

The Art of Teaming includes:

- The principles and practices of team learning.
- Tools and models for team development.
- Stories of successes and learning challenges in team environments
- Introduction to the core of coaching leadership

This book is much more than a reading experience, it is a real invitation to be part of a change that releases the real potential of teams.

