

Book review

Stout-Rostron, S. (2019). *Transformational Coaching to Lead Culturally Diverse Teams*. London: Routledge.

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The work that I do with individual leaders, teams and organisations is focused on helping teams work better as interdependent networks. As such, the opportunity to review this book was a welcome opportunity to explore the perspectives of an author whose experience and rigor could assist in my personal and professional growth.

A convergence of factors make this book increasingly relevant for coaching practitioners. First, there is an increased reliance on teams within organisations globally. Second, globalisation has changed the nature of those teams, such that they are often both culturally diverse and remote. Finally, organisations better understand that the maximisation of talent cannot occur without embracing diversity (e.g. cultural, gender, age) and more inclusive practices. Stout-Rostron points to these forces early in the book and notes that there is a need to “grasp the dramatic transformation of society and organisations driven by the ‘Fourth Industrial Revolution’” (p. 13). According to the author, working effectively with leaders, teams and organisations requires coaches to develop a firm grasp of the realities faced by those they seek to help.

In the first half of the book, Stout-Rostron presents the basic case for team coaching, with a succinct, yet thorough, summary of why and how team coaching is important for both teams and practitioners. Helpfully, this includes (in Chapter 4) an exploration of the author’s own High-Performance Relationship Coaching Model, with a generous mix of case studies and practical reflections. This also includes (on page 48) an acknowledgement of scholarly influences underpinning the model, somewhat reflective of a “systemic-eclectic” approach to team coaching (Clutterbuck, 2010). With the introduction of each model, the reader is encouraged to engage in self-directed learning, such that s/he might deepen personal understanding of models as

diverse as Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team model (Lencioni, 2006) through to Spinelli's philosophical interpretation of existential phenomenology (Spinelli, 2010). Pleasingly, Stout-Rostron also overtly acknowledges the circular logic of systems thinking, such that her team coaching model explicitly presents team development as a dynamic, non-linear process. As the author notes, the "idea of circularity has had a strong influence on my team coaching model" (p. 45).

The second half of the book advocates strongly for the importance of diversity and culture. "The importance of coaches understanding diversity and culture, especially for team coaching, cannot be overemphasised" (p. 82). Whilst it has become a cliché to say that we live in a VUCA world (i.e. Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous), as a former colleague is fond of saying, "it's a cliché for a reason". With this VUCA reality in mind, I was fascinated to read Chapter 6 and learn about (for the first time) the African philosophical concept of "ubuntu" and, more specifically, absorb key aspects of an Ubuntu coaching model (as presented by contributor Dumisani Magadla). For anyone looking for a non-Western approach to team coaching, underpinned by the principles of humanism, complexity and systems thinking, the Ubuntu model will be of great interest and the ancient African philosophies that inform it:

Ubuntu coaching is predicated on [the] core value system of humaneness and interrelationships. It is inherently systems-based meta-model of coaching. (p. 92)

As a first-generation Australian from South Africa, the chapter on Ubuntu coaching was especially salient. My enjoyment of it was partly related to my new learning and a recognition of my cultural heritage. But there was also something else, something holistic. It reinforced for me how beneficial it can be – as coaches – to value culture and diversity, such that we can work more effectively in organisations. After reading the book, I think there are opportunities for all coaches to do two things. First, to understand more fully the cultural influences that inform their world views. Second, to consider more culturally diverse approaches to coaching. To date, my experience in coaching has been informed predominantly by Western theories and models. But I know see that there is potential value to be gained from considering other cultural perspectives (e.g. African, Asian) as ways to understand the inherent complexity of teams and human interaction.

Notably this book is relatively short (under 150 pages), yet it manages to capture and distil diverse perspectives. Indeed, any of the chapters could become the topic of a book all of its own. Stout-Rostron and the other contributing authors present a highly practical, well researched book that seems well suited to any coaching practitioner keen to develop their team coaching skills, irrespective of their commitment to cultural diversity. For those seeking specifically to embed cultural diversity in their approach, the book presents established and emerging coaching philosophies to complement their existing practices.

References

- Clutterbuck, D., 2010. Coaching reflection: The liberated coach. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 3(1), pp.73-81.
- Lencioni, P., 2006. *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Spinelli, E., 2010. Existential coaching. In E. Cox, T. Bachkirova, & D. Clutterbuck, *The Complete Handbook of Coaching*. London: Sage. (pp. 94-106).