

Academic Paper

# The Impact of Team Coach's Presence on Their Relationships with Teams

Sebastian Fox [✉](mailto:sebastian.fox@brownfox.co.uk) (brownfox consultancy)

## Abstract

This study explored how team coaches perceive presence and how presence affects their relationships with teams. It also sought to offer insights into those phenomena to enable team coaches to apply reflexivity in their own practice. Nine experienced team coaches were interviewed using semi-structured interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The three main findings are that: presence is multi-faceted; presence requires self-awareness; and presence is inherently relational. Participants described a presence continuum with coaches having a preference to work towards either polarity. Recognising that preference allows team coaches to develop their skills towards the other polarity in service of teams' needs.

## Keywords

presence, presencing, relationships, team coaching

## Article history

Accepted for publication: 19 May 2022

Published online: 01 June 2022



© the Author(s)

Published by Oxford Brookes University

## Introduction

### 1. Team Coaching

Team coaching as a distinct practice is relatively new but its use as a development intervention has been increasing rapidly (Jones, Napiersky & Lyubovnikova, 2019). A lack of clarity remains, nonetheless, as to how it should be defined and how team coaching differs from other team interventions (Lawrence & Whyte, 2017). Blurring also exists between the boundaries of differing team interventions such as team training, facilitation or group coaching (Lawrence, 2019). With little agreement as to what 'team coaching' constitutes (Widdowson & Barbour, 2021) it is helpful to distinguish it from other potential team interventions. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) in their paper on team coaching competencies, refers to different team interventions as 'modalities' ICF (2020).

Table 1 shows that the key distinguishing features of team coaching compared with other modalities are the longer duration, emphasis on partnering between the coach and team, the approach and ownership together with a focus on the team's dynamics. However, in attempting to cover the whole spectrum of practices, this table does not necessarily reflect the reality for team coaching practitioners where boundaries are not as clear cut as the table implies. For the purposes of this study the following definition of team coaching is used: "Partnering with the team to unleash its collective power, purpose and potential to connect and collaborate" (Woudstra, 2021 p. 39), suggesting an emergent nature to team coaching with a focus on relationships, both between the coach and team and within the team itself.

**Table 1: Team Coaching Modalities**

	Team Building	Team Training	Team Consulting	Team Mentoring	Team Facilitation	Team Coaching
Approach	Didactic	Didactic	Monologic	Monologic	Monologic	Dialogic
Ownership	Instructor	Trainer	Consultant	Mentor	Facilitator and team	Team
Principal Aims	Enhance relationships	New knowledge or skills	New insights	New knowledge	Clarity	Goal achievement; team dynamics
Process	Exercises	Set materials	Expert shares experience	Mentor shares experience	Facilitation of process/task	Partnering
Time Frame	Short, 1-5 days	Short, 1-5 days	Varies widely	Staccato over extended time	Short, 1-5 days	Months

Note. Adapted from ICF Team Coaching Competencies, 2020, p.3.

**Table 2: Examples of Definitions of Presence in Working with Teams or Groups**

Definition	Key Attributes
Presence is intentional use of self, requiring awareness of self and others in service of the client...another way to look at it is through the a temporal lens of past present and future (Tolbert & Hanafin, 2006)	Use of self, self-awareness; temporal in nature
Presence is an attribute incorporating resource and resilience, of sufficient confidence in one's ground to deal with the here and now (Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan, 2007)	Confidence, resourceful, present moment, grounded
Presence is greater than the separate parts of our way of facilitating. It comprises our knowledge, human, process and technical skills (Dilworth, 2008)	All of our selves
Presence is about creating an enabling space. Enabling for the client and coach and learning. It is a way of being which is constructed from a whole range of things (Iiffe-Wood, 2014)	Creating the container through being; all of our selves
"Being fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, grounded and confident" (ICF, 2020b p.13)	Confidence, present in the moment, grounded
"Presence is how <i>you do you</i> " (Woudstra, 2021 p.100)	All of our selves

## 2. Presence

Much of the existing body of work on presence derives from other helping professions and, more recently, dyadic coaching (Noon, 2018). Whilst very few definitions refer specifically to presence in team coaching, the ICF (2020) considered presence as having elements of being fully conscious and present with a grounded and confident style. Authors such as Denham-Vaughan & Chidiac (2009) captured the nature of presence as essentially relational, ethical and arising from the situation and moment, aspects of presence which are key to understanding its importance to team coaches. Other definitions are set out in Table 2.

## 3. Coaching Relationship

For the purposes of this article, 'coaching relationship' as defined by Denham-Vaughan & Chidiac (2013) will be used since it captures most closely the nature of this study. This refers to the relationships between or amongst people as offering the greatest possibility for change. Some authors, such as Stelter (2014), consider presence and relationships to be intrinsically linked and studies have shown that relationship strength is an important factor in both therapeutic and coaching conversations (Williams, 2015). Wotruba (2016) concurred in finding that the coaching relationship is integral to team coaching by facilitating the trust-building necessary to foster effective team working.

A further element in the literature is the reference to coaches needing to reflect deeply on their own presence and impact, for example, Armstrong (2012). Moreover, Kovacs & Corrie (2017) argue that reflexive capacity is widely seen as a fundamental component of effective coaching practice.

There are extensive gaps in the literature over how team coaching is defined, what is understood by the term 'presence' in team coaching, and how presence affects relationship of the coach with the teams that they coach. Therefore, the question for this study was "How do team coaches perceive their presence and how do those perceptions affect their relationship with teams?" The objectives for this research were to:

- Examine how coaches perceive presence when coaching teams
- Explore the link between presence and relationship within team coaching engagements
- Create a study providing the opportunity for team coaches to examine their own practices reflexively.

This article moves now to a brief literature review, followed by a description of the methodology used, an overview and discussion of the main findings, and ends with the main conclusions.

## Literature review

Authors such as Nevis (2013) believed presence to be the totality of who we are as individuals, and Woudstra (2021) as an individual's normal patterns of relating and what this provokes in others. Presence, from a Gestalt perspective, is also inextricably linked to the 'use of self', that is, how an individual leverages their presence to evoke or provoke client awareness and action. Although definitions vary, for example, Chidiac & Denham-Vaughan (2007) who saw presence as 'energetic availability and fluid responsiveness', self-awareness is an important aspect. Siminovitch & Eron (2008) explicitly stated that without an understanding of their presence and how it is affecting their client, a coach is unlikely to be able to use their presence to best effect as the catalysing force in the client's learning. A common understanding and definition remain, however, elusive.

Whilst the body of literature on presence in dyadic coaching is growing, for example, Silsbee (2019) and Bluckert (2020), it remains limited in team coaching. Authors such as Woudstra (2021) have started to address this gap and other relevant literature exists. Examples include Denham-

Vaughan & Chidiac (2009) and Siminovitch & Eron (2008) in Gestalt coaching, Cheung-Judge (2012) and Chidiac (2018) in Organisational Development and Dilworth (2021) in facilitation. Much of the practice literature, particularly around Gestalt, also comments on how the greater the skill of the coach in leveraging their presence and use of self, the greater the clients' trust in their working relationship, such as Siminovitch (2017).

Many studies have commented on the importance of the relationship, or alliance, in dyadic coaching including Bluckert (2006), de Haan (2008) and Palmer & McDowall (2010). de Haan (2008) went further in identifying the quality of the relationship as perceived by the client to be the critical predictor of the outcome of a coaching engagement, a finding echoed by Critchley (2010). This is consistent with the literature from other helping professions such as psychotherapy, nursing and teaching (Noon, 2018). While more recent studies would seem to support the centrality of the coaching relationship to the perceived success of the intervention (Bluckert, 2020), there is insufficient evidence to assert unequivocally that the coaching alliance is an active ingredient in coaching (O'Broin, 2016). Authors including Clutterbuck (2011) and Hawkins (2014) mention the importance of the coaching relationship in team coaching interventions and Wotruba's (2016) research focused specifically on the relationship of the team coach with the team and the critical role of trust. However, overall, there appears to be little literature specifically considering the role of the relationship in team coaching.

The focus here will be on those attributes identified in the literature which appear to link most directly the team coach's presence and relationship with the team, including Trust, Empathy and Attunement. Wotruba's (2016) study, with a small sample size, identified five key themes in building a coach's relationship with the team; including: confidence; tension; evolving; complexity; and trust. Wotruba (2016) also noted that the need to build trust at both an individual and a collective level appears to be characteristic of the relationship between the coach and team. Trust is seen as vital not only in creating the relationship between the coach and team, but also in the effective functioning of relationships at an interpersonal and team level (Costa, Fulmer & Anderson, 2018).

Studies into how trust is created have found empathy and attunement to be key. Empathy is the ability to experience another's cognitive state while maintaining a clear view of self (Guthridge & Giummarra, 2021). It is fundamental to therapeutic relationships and is a foundation of therapists' ability to understand their clients' feelings sensitively and accurately (Brown, Dawson & McHugh 2018). Attunement – being in harmony with other and self - is a key part of a therapist's skills (Brown et al., 2018), leading to emotional resonance between the therapist and client (Raimundo, 2020) and fostering an environment which is more conducive to enabling change to occur (Brown et al., 2018).

Evidence exists that the vagus nerve might play a role in this process. Polyvagal Theory proposed that the nervous system in mammals evolved to carry out three functions: survival; reproduction; and social engagement (Porges, 2007). This last system influences our sympathetic arousal and allows emotional attunement, linking the primary muscles of the face, mouth and throat to the stomach, and allowing real-time 'gut reaction' (Cozolino, 2006). Particularly important is the bi-directional impact on the organs and brain, that is, the vagal system provides a continuous feedback loop resulting in somatic experiences (Cozolino, 2006). This offers a possible understanding of the physiology underpinning the somatic experience of coaches, their presence, and their use of self in being attuned, empathetic and in relationship with the team.

## Methodology

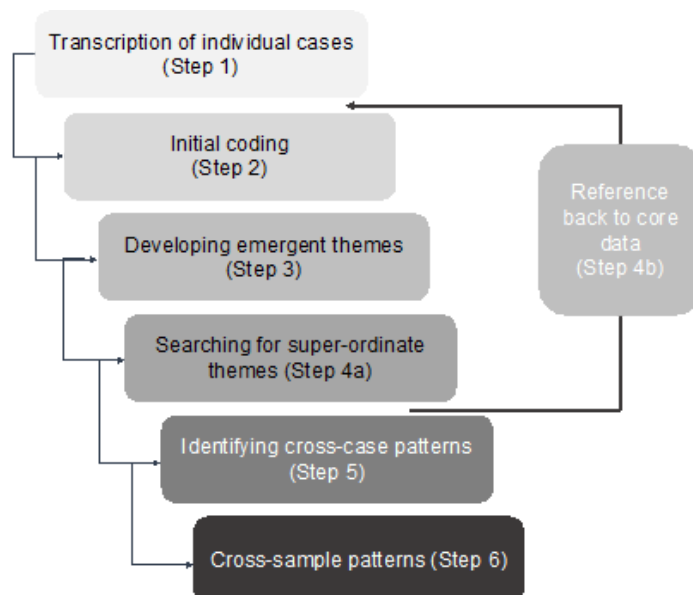
This research sets out to understand how team coaches perceive presence and how those affect their relationship with teams they coach. It is not seeking to uncover a discoverable truth about phenomena, aiming instead to understand the meaning made by coaches as individuals of their

experiences in coaching teams. Essentially, knowledge is considered not as a representation or a reflection of reality but as interpretations (Chiari & Nuzzo, 2009) and thus, a constructivist philosophy underpins it. It can be argued that because this study is researching a phenomenon within team coaching, social constructionism might be a more appropriate philosophy in this context as it holds that meaning is developed through the interaction between coach and client (Buschi, 2016). However, given that it is the individual coach's experience and meaning rather than the meaning collectively made by the coach and team which is being explored, a social constructivist stance is adopted. This is consistent with Critchley (2010) who located coaching within social constructivist ontology.

Within this constructivist framework, the question arises of how best to interpret the meaning of what participants have shared? One way is by taking a phenomenological stance - usually employed when researchers are investigating questions around participants' lived experience - and when, in particular, studying a phenomenon (Bachkirova, Rose & Noon, 2020). Accordingly, the strategy chosen for this study is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), where the goal is to investigate how individuals make sense in their own terms of their lived experience rather than through pre-determined themes (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). In IPA, there is a thread linking embodied experience, talk of the experience and a participant's making meaning of the experience (Smith, 2011). IPA has several characteristics making it particularly relevant. It allows for deeper understanding of phenomena through hermeneutics and ideography, seeking to locate the data within the context and language of the participants and, at the same time, allowing interpretation of the potential meaning and themes arising (Rajasinghe, 2020). It also recognises the reader needs to be able to make meaning if the research is to have value (Smith et al., 2009), which is important in the context of one of the aims of this study being to help coaches in their reflexive practice.

IPA's acceptance as a good methodology for new and/or under-researched disciplines makes it particularly suitable for the investigation of coaching as a relatively new and under-researched area (Rajasinghe, 2020). He noted the importance of IPA researchers maintaining a reflective and reflexive stance to focus on placing participants' experience central in the research. Given that this researcher's belief is that it is impossible to avoid being influenced by and making one's own interpretations of the meanings made, it seems appropriate to acknowledge this within the analytical framework adopted. Whilst IPA does not prescribe a particular methodology, the process suggested in Figure 1 is a potential guide.

**Figure 1: Guidelines for Analysis in IPA**



Note. Adapted from Rose in Bachkirova et al. (2020 p. 84)

In order to develop as deep and rich an understanding as possible of what presence means to team coaches, only those with a team coaching qualification or at least ten years coaching experience, together with a master certification from a recognised coaching body such as the ICF or Association for Coaching were considered. Using purposive sampling nine coaches fulfilling one or other – and sometimes both – of the criteria, drawn from the researcher’s own network, were invited to participate. This number is consistent with other IPA studies, for example, Gyllensten & Palmer (2007). Although all participants were guaranteed anonymity one requested her comments be attributable. Subsequently, other participants also requested attributability and, accordingly, they are identified in Table 3 and where quoted.

**Table 3: Participants’ Demographics**

Participant	Gender	Location	Years Working as a Team coach	Accreditation/ Qualification	Gestalt Influence
Declan Woods (DW)	Male	UK	20 years +	MCC <sup>1</sup>	Yes
Michelle Chambers (MC)	Female	Canada	25 years +	TCP <sup>2</sup>	
Georgina Woudstra (GW)	Female	UK	20 years +	MCC	Yes
Marilyn O’Hearne (MOH)	Female	US	10 years	MCC	
Tara Nolan (TN)	Female	Ireland	13 years	MCC	Yes
Chip McFarlane (CM)	Male	Australia	11 years	MCC	
Sally Denham-Vaughan (SDV)	Female	UK	20 years +	ISCP <sup>3</sup>	Yes
Nobantu Mpotulo (NM)	Female	South Africa	15 years	MCC	Yes
Dorothy Siminovitch (DS)	Female	Canada/US	25 years +	MCC	Yes

Note: <sup>1</sup>ICF Master Certified Coach; <sup>2</sup>Team Coaching International; <sup>3</sup>International Society of Coaching Psychology

Semi-structured interviews lasting between 55-80 minutes were used to collect data. All were held virtually and recorded via Zoom. Transcripts were generated automatically from the Zoom recording via otter.ai software and subsequently checked for accuracy. The pilot interviews highlighted that not all the requisite data were being captured, thus leading to several modifications and one additional question to ensure full exploration of the experience.

IPA is sometimes referred to as employing double hermeneutics, whereby analysis of participants’ personal accounts is followed by discussion of the wider themes and then typically paired with the researcher’s own interpretation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This is backed up by an ideographic approach which seeks to explore every single participant’s views before producing any generalised statements (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In essence, the analysis is focused on the participants’ meaning making of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

In practice, recognising the large sample size for an IPA study, there was a trade-off between completing a very detailed analysis of the data phenomenologically and the level to which this could be done (Smith et al., 2009). The steps taken for analysis are shown in Figure 1 above, with the recording listened to once and the transcript read four times (Step 1) before coding, and then each analysed in turn (2). Emergent themes and thoughts were noted during the initial reading through of the transcripts and, when coding, a mind map was constructed for each one to highlight the themes arising (3). Super-ordinate themes were identified for each case, consolidated within a spreadsheet (4a) and referenced back to the transcripts (4b). Cross case patterns were identified from individual case coding (5), and cross sample patterns were identified from the consolidated list and then compared against a final mind map (6) to summarise the final themes and to check consistency.



## Discussion and Findings

When considering the question of how coaches perceive presence and how that affects their relationship with the team, three super-ordinate themes emerged. These are:

1. 'Presence' is Multi-faceted'
2. Presence Requires Self-awareness
3. Presence is Inherently Relational

A summary is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Themes Arising from the Interviews**

Super-ordinate theme	Subordinate theme
Presence is Multi-faceted	1. Present and Presencing
	2. Being present
	3. Presencing
	4. Dialectic of presence
	5. Presence is multi-layered
Presence Requires Self-Awareness	6. Grounding
	7. Developing self-awareness
Presence is Inherently Relational	8. Presence is understood relationally
	9. How presence contributes to relationships
	10. Building the relationship and creating a safe space

### 1. Super-ordinate Theme: Presence is Multi-faceted

In common with authors such as Nevis (2013) who stated that it can be defined in many ways, participants had differing views on what constitutes presence. There is a strong sense that they bring their whole selves when they are with their client, in other words, all their past and present knowledge and state are brought together in that moment, as referenced by Dilworth (2008) and Woudstra (2021) (see Table 2). It is coupled with a dynamic component which infuses the coach and team with a certain energy, resonant of 'energetic availability' and 'fluid responsiveness', qualities of presence described by Chidiac & Denham-Vaughan (2007). As one participant said:

*Imagine a great big, fat dinosaur tail connected to your body. And within that it's all of your gifts and strengths and experiences that have brought you to this point in your life, and they will be with you as you move forward (MOH)*

Whilst different understandings of presence exist, some commonalities emerged, as described below.

#### 1.1 'Present' and 'Presencing'

There appears a clear distinction between being present to the team and the act of using their presence, or 'presencing'. Being present is the quality described by Chidiac & Denham-Vaughan (2018) as 'present-centeredness', a requirement of presence. Presencing conveys a sense of the coach not just being actively attentive to what is happening – being present - but dynamically responding to and engaging with the team, using all their faculties. Participants experienced themselves as being fully focused and paying attention to the team, manifested by feeling alive,

awake and *there*, with them. Being present requires real focus on the team with participants describing it as greater sharpness, everything else fading into the background.

*Nothing in the world, nothing else in the world exists other than them and what we're talking about (CM)*

The act of 'presencing' is contrasted with the state of being present. Presencing is a concept within Gestalt which Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers (2005 p. 220) liken to "bringing into presence". It appears further distinguished from being present by the conscious awareness of the coach in relation to their presence and an intentionality about how they choose to act in relationship to what they notice. Use of self is an aspect which also appears closely associated with presencing. It conveys what coaches notice and how they choose to respond to what is happening in the moment (Woudstra, 2021). Through use of self, participants raised awareness amongst the team of what was emerging, hence allowing the team to attend to it.

*So, presence is really the ground that use of self emerges from for me (GW)*

Flow was considered as important, associated with an effortless and being attuned to what individuals are going to say – almost a prescience – and a sense of focus, as well as an empathic responsiveness with the team. Through being very focused and in flow, participants shifted awareness between themselves, the team and the wider environment - or 'other' - at any given moment. This flow between the three is described by Woudstra (2021) as Self-Team-Situation (S-T-S), adapted from Denham-Vaughan & Chidiac (2013). Noticing the flow through S-T-S is a critical element of presencing, with the coach seeking to align all three through their presence (Chidiac & Denham-Vaughan, 2018). Further, a coach may have a natural bias towards one of those elements, requiring them to be conscious in maintaining a balance between all three (Woudstra, 2021).

*And so there is that awareness of what's present individually, internally to me and what's present that is impacted by the external environment where the team is (NM)*

Being in flow with the other is consistent with other studies, notably Noon (2018) who described in detail the flow of conversations in dyadic coaching, and which allows the coach to shift their attention between S-T-S (Woudstra, 2021).

## 1.2 Dialectic of Presence

Several participants characterised what they describe as a dialectic in how team coaches might choose to work with teams, from a more facilitative approach to a more emergent one. This dialectic is a natural manifestation of coach philosophy, stance and beliefs (Woudstra, 2021), with Table 5 highlighting some of its attributes.

**Table 5: Summary of Coach Dialectic Approach to Working with Teams**

Facilitative Approach		Emergent Approach	
Present		Present and Presencing	
Intentional		Intuitive	DW
Facilitation		Holding the space	MC
'Doing to'		'Being with'	GW
Ecological		Ecological	SDV
Context, agenda		Process	DS



*Presence is an ethical stance, and it consists of this flexing awareness of self-other-situation... we now call it 'egological', you know, which is the planned intervention that includes others and operates on the system, versus ecological which is the much more relational, emergent style (SDV)*

## **2. Super-Ordinate Theme: Presence Requires Self-Awareness and Grounding**

The second super-ordinate theme focuses on how coaches bring themselves to sessions and stay present during coaching. Grounding, the immediate connection with the moment (Tull, 2021), appears to be an important contributor to how participants honed their ability to be present and presencing. A distinction was drawn between being grounded at the start of the session and re-grounding themselves during a coaching session. Both aspects of grounding are inherently related to coach self-awareness.

In all cases, the purpose of the grounding was to allow the coach to be more attentive and receptive to what they were noticing in the team, giving them more choice on how to respond. Equally important is the ability to re-ground during coaching, requiring coaches to recognise when they are taken out of presence and what triggered them, as emphasised by Siminovitch (2017).

*Often, the very things that coaches reach for and think they need, are what takes them out of being present to the here and now (GW)*

Being re-grounded allows the coaches to regain the flow of S-T-S.

### **2.1 Developing Self-Awareness**

Self-awareness through reflexive practice is critical in developing empathy (Cozolino, 2006). All participants recognised the need to work on their own presence and develop greater self-awareness, enabling them to understand better what they were bringing into sessions and what belonged to the team. Essentially, by being more self-aware team coaches can understand better their impact on the team, an important quality noted by Jacox (2019), and also to be intentional in the choices they make. As Bluckert (2015) remarked, a coach with little awareness of their presence and how it impacts others is coaching without the full picture.

## **3. Super-ordinate Theme: Presence is Inherently Relational**

### **3.1 Presence is Understood Relationally**

As highlighted earlier, some authors such as Chidiac (2018) consider presence to be wholly relational. That presence can only be experienced with another would appear to be borne out in this study.

*Of course, you can be present to yourself and your own thoughts, but as soon as you come into contact... you are in relation (TN)*

Considering the question of how participants create their relationships with a team, broad agreement exists that trust is a critical factor, a finding in line with Wotruba (2016). Trust appears engendered through inter-woven ways including demonstrating empathy and attunement, increased acuity, connecting and caring, and is consistent with Zak (2018b), who found that demonstrating empathy and caring increases trust. It seems that these characteristics are exhibited as integral attributes of the participants' presence.

*Trust, to me is the foundation of every relationship (MC)*

A sense of connection and reciprocity was experienced during coaching. This finding is consistent with Stolorow's (1997 p. 338) description of a "continual flow of mutual reciprocal influence".

*So, presence isn't just about me, it's what's happening between and, so, like an infinity symbol is a picture that comes to mind (GW)*

All participants reported feeling some increased acuity when fully present, noticing and feeling in different ways including observationally, neurologically or somatically.

*It's almost like I sort of picture my radar being on full alert, and me having the capacity to, to pay attention to lots of different aspects of a team at the same time (DW)*

Some coaches rely heavily on this sensing as part of their work with the team and the different ways participants noticed is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: How and Where Participants Noticed**

Participant	How Experienced	Where/How Experienced
DW	Observationally	-
MC	Observationally	-
GW	Somatically	Gut, stomach
MOH	Somatically	Heart
TN	Somatically	Jaw
CM	Somatically	Warmth, energy
SDV	Somatically	Forehead
MN	Somatically	Stillness, calmness
DS	Somatically	Chest

This somatic experience was expressed by one of the participants:

*Because presence comes from the body and out of all our faculties. That's the only faculty that doesn't lie. Our emotions lie, or we interpret them, our minds and thoughts. But our bodies are the only truth tellers (NM)*

The importance of one's somatic experience is highlighted by Blake, (2018).

### 3.2 Building the Relationship and Creating a Safe Space

Intentional building of trust through their presence enabled the coaches and team together to create a psychologically safe space for the team to do its work. All participants commented on how this was central to their coaching and is consistent with authors such as Woudstra (2021) and, particularly, Edmondson (2019). As one of the participants shared:

*We need to make it safe enough for people to visit challenging situations in a learning mode, where they will not be shamed (DS)*

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to

- i. Understand team coach perceptions of their presence

- ii. Explore the link between presence and relationship within team coaching engagements
- iii. Provide the opportunity and offer insights for coaches to examine their own practices reflexively

## 1. Perceptions of Presence

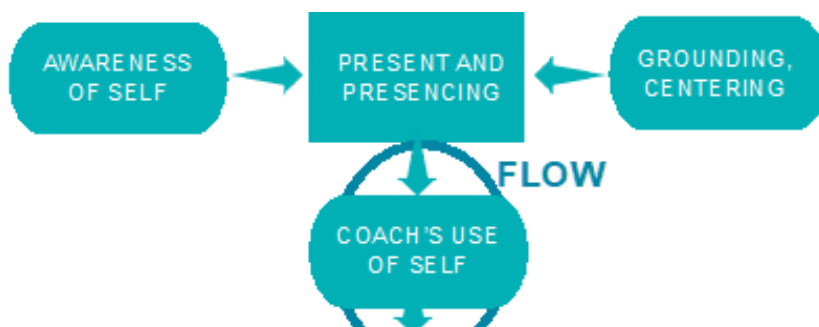
There was consensus that presence is more than simply being present and focused in the moment. Participants agreed on there being a difference between being present and the act of ‘presencing’, which might also be characterised as ‘anchored presence’ and ‘activated presence’, summarised in Table 7:

**Table 7: Characteristics of Anchored and Activated Presence**

Anchored Presence (Present)	Activated Presence (Present and Presencing)
Awake	Use of self
Alert	Flow
Alive	Energy
Aware	Self-Team-Situation
In the moment	Consciously aware
Focused	
Unconsciously aware	

As coaches become more self-aware, they are able to choose how far they might flex their position in the moment along the continuum from anchored to activated presence. Presence also requires grounding and centering through self-awareness, allowing use of self as shown in Figure 2.

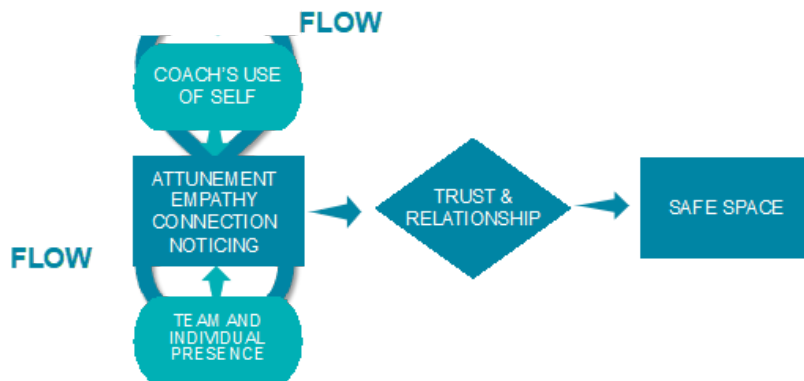
**Figure 2: Activated Presence**



## 2. The Link Between Presence and Relationships

Presence is experienced relationally. That is, presence is an inherent part of who we are, and coaches are able, through their presence, to foster the conditions for relationships to form. Attributes such as empathy, being in flow, noticing, attunement, and connection-reciprocity all contribute to the building of trust, which is a key element in creating the relationship within team coaching (Wotruba, 2016). Their presence enables the coaches to engender trust and to build the relationship which, in turn, creates the container necessary for the team to do its work (Woudstra, 2021), as shown in Figure 3.

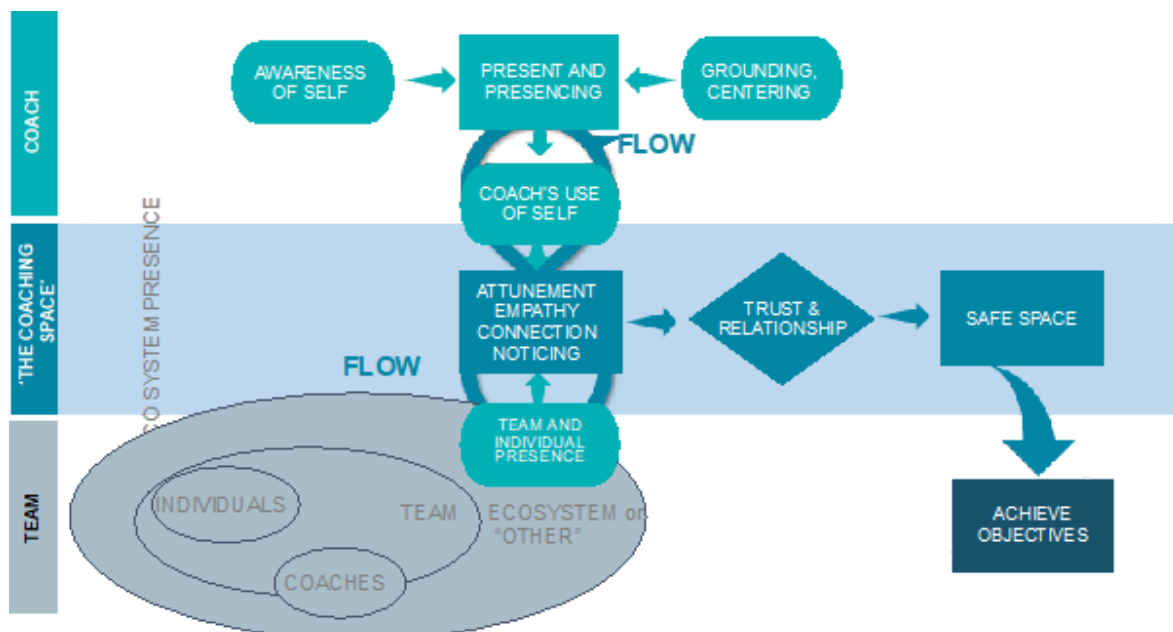
Figure 3: Relational Components of Presence



### 3. How Presence Affects the Relationship with the Team

Participants were also clear on what might impact relationships - particularly stress - and their ability to co-maintain the container with the team. Knowing what takes them out of presence and how to re-ground during a session is therefore critical. Grounding activities used during a coaching session could play a role in reducing stress, making the coaches more receptive to social interaction and recognising emotions (Quintana, Guastella, Outhred, Hickie & Kemp, 2012). A coach could experience many variations in presence during coaching, each subtly impacting their relationship with the team in conscious and unconscious ways. The extent to which they notice these variations will depend on their self-awareness. Figure 4 summarises the interplay between the coach's presence and their relationship with the team.

Figure 4: Conceptualisation of Presence and Relationships

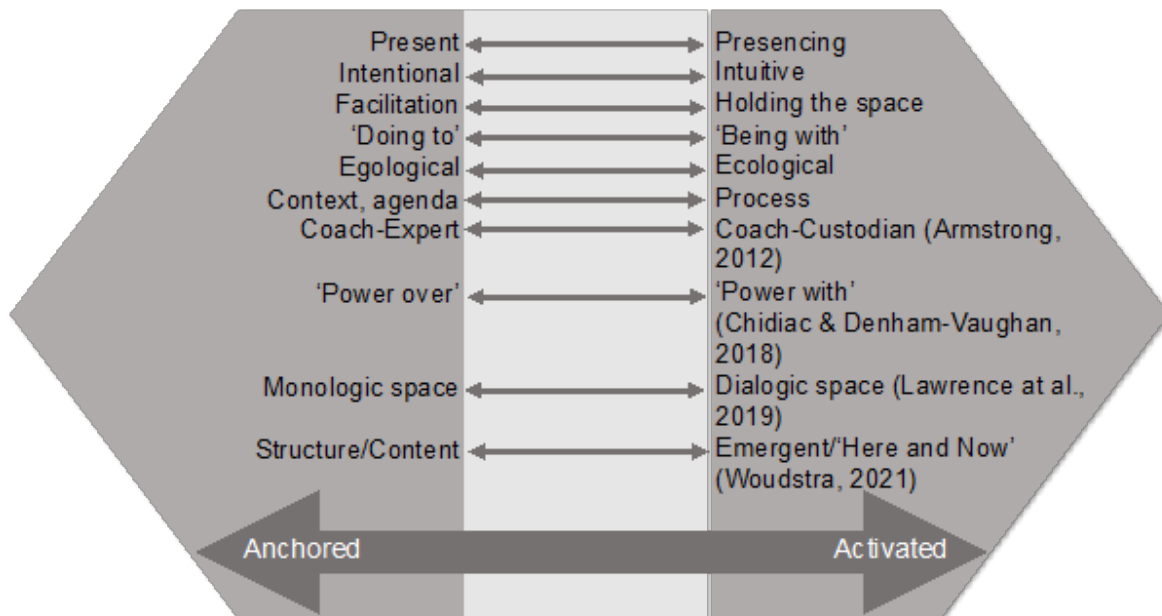


### 4. Implications for Team Coaches in their Reflexive Practice

Hanley-Browne (2021) noted the reflective process helps coaches increase awareness of their professional presence and how they impact and are impacted by relationships. Similarly, Thornton (2019) commented on the importance of reflexive practice. This study has shown that participants

recognised the importance of developing greater self-awareness and understanding of the impact they made. Combining the perceptions of presence from Tables 5 and 7 with the literature allows development of a heuristic for presence, as shown in Figure 5. It is suggested coaches will have a natural preference to work towards one end of the continuum or other, an attribute also recognised by Graves (2021).

**Figure 5: The Presence Continuum**



## 5. Contribution to practice

The contribution to practice is to give coaches the opportunity to deepen their understanding of self and recognise when they are doing their best work, be it through anchored or activated presence. Understanding this preference offers choice over developing skills and range towards the opposite polarity – each with very different impact –in service of the team's needs (ICF, 2020).

## 6. Limitations of this Study

Given most of the participants and the researcher are skilled users of Gestalt practices, this could have influenced the diversity of perceptions and descriptions of presence and experiences, and the subsequent analysis. There is also a possibility that the results may have been different if the research had been conducted with coaches who are not familiar with Gestalt approaches. The selection of experienced coaches may have mitigated this somewhat. It is also recognised that there may have been unconscious bias in some of the analysis, with the researcher being drawn towards comments and themes which echo their own experiences and preferences. An interesting topic for future research would be to explore client perceptions of coach presence and how this impacts the relationship.

## References

- Armstrong, H. (2012). Coaching as dialogue: Creating spaces for (mis)understandings. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 10(1), pp.33-47. Available at: <https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/6b2fdcb2-be2c-4f9c-8072-f48866aeb383/1/>.

- Bachkirova, T., Rose, A., & Noon, R. (2020). Phenomenological approaches. In E. Jackson, P. Cox (Ed.), *Doing coaching research* (pp. 79–92). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Blake, A. (2018). *Your body is your brain. Leverage your somatic intelligence to find purpose, build resilience, deepen relationships and lead more powerfully*. Trokay Press.
- Bluckert, P. (2006). *Psychological dimensions of executive coaching*. Open University Press.
- Bluckert, P. (2015). *Gestalt coaching: Right here, right now*. Open University Press.
- Bluckert, P. (2020). *Gestalt coaching: Distinctive features*. Taylor and Francis.
- Brown, H. Dawson, N. McHugh, B. (2018). *Psychology, emotion and intuition in work relationships: The head, heart and gut professional*. Taylor and Francis.
- Buschi, A. E. (2016). How executive coaches' meaning making informs their choices in coaching sessions [ProQuest Information & Learning]. In *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering* (Vol. 76, Issues 9-B(E)).
- Cheung-Judge, M.-Y. (2012). The self as an instrument: A cornerstone for the future of OD. *OD Practitioner*, 44(2), 42–47. DOI: 10.5840/philtoday199337128.
- Chiari, G., & Nuzzo, M. L. (2009). Constructivist psychotherapy: A narrative hermeneutic approach. In *Constructivist Psychotherapy: A Narrative Hermeneutic Approach*
- Chidiac, M. (2018). *Relational organisational gestalt*. Routledge.
- Chidiac, M.-A., & Denham-Vaughan, S. (2007). The process of presence: energetic availability and fluid responsiveness. *British Gestalt Journal*, 16(1), 9–19.
- Chidiac, M.-A., & Denham-Vaughan, S. (2018). Presence for Everyone: A Dialogue. In *Gestalt Review* (Vol. 22, Issue 1). DOI: 10.5325/gestaltreview.22.1.0035.
- Clutterbuck, D. (2011). *Coaching the team at work*. Nicholas Brealey International.
- Costa, A. C., Fulmer, C. A., & Anderson, N. R. (2018). Trust in work teams: An integrative review, multilevel model, and future directions. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 39(2), 169–184. DOI: 10.1002/job.2213.
- Cozolino, L. J. (2006). *The neuroscience of human relationships: Attachment and the developing social brain*. W. W. Norton.
- Critchley, W. (2010). Relational coaching: Taking the coaching high road. *Journal of Management Development*, 29(10), 851–863. DOI: 10.1108/02621711011084187.
- de Haan, E. (2008). *Relational coaching: Journeys towards mastering one-to-one learning*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Denham-Vaughan, S., & Chidiac, M. (2013). SOS: a relational orientation towards social inclusion. *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, 17(2), 100–107. DOI: 10.1108/20428301311330162.
- Denham-Vaughan, S., & Chidiac, M.-A. (2009). Dialogue goes to work: Relational organisational gestalt. In R. Hycner & L. Jacobs (Eds.), *Relational approaches in gestalt therapy* (pp. 249-296.). Gestalt Press Book.
- Dilworth, S. (2008). *Facilitator presence: An autoethnography*. [Doctor of Professional Practice, Bournemouth University]. In Practice. Available at: <http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/15986/>.
- Dilworth, S. (2021). *The heart of facilitation: Developing a facilitator signature*. Steve Dilworth. Available at: <https://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/HeartofFacilitation>.
- Edmondson, A. (2019). *The fearless organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation, and growth*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Graves, G. (2021). What do the experiences of team coaches tell us about the essential elements of team coaching? *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 15, 229–245. DOI: 10.24384/pfh5-b855.
- Guthridge, M., & Giummarra, M. J. (2021). The Taxonomy of Empathy: A Meta-definition and the Nine Dimensions of the Empathic System. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 00221678211018015. DOI: 10.1177/00221678211018015.
- Gyllensten, K., & Palmer, S. (2007). The coaching relationship: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 2(2), 168–177.
- Hanley-Browne, R. (2021). What Do Team Coaches Experience at the End of a Client Relationship? *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 15, 20–36. DOI: 10.24384/PGFG-2005.
- Hawkins, P. (2014). *Leadership team coaching: Developing collective transformational leadership*. (2nd Ed.). Kogan Page.
- ICF. (2020). *Team coaching competencies: Moving beyond one to one coaching*. Available at: <https://coachingfederation.org/team-coaching-competencies>.
- Jacox, w. (2019). What are the key qualities and skills of an effective team coach? In D. Clutterbuck, J. Gannon, S. Hayes, I. Iordanou, K. Lowe, & D. Mackie (Eds.), *The practitioner's handbook of team coaching*. (pp. 353–364). Routledge.



- Jones, R. J., Napiersky, U., & Lyubovnikova, J. (2019). Conceptualizing the distinctiveness of team coaching. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 34(2), 62–78. DOI: 10.1108/JMP-07-2018-0326.
- Kovacs, L., & Corrie, S. (2017). Building reflective capability to enhance coaching practice. *Coaching Psychologist*, 13(1), 4–12.
- Lawrence, P. (2019). Defining team coaching. In D. Clutterbuck, D. Gannon, J. Hayes, S. Iordanou, I. Lowe, I. MacKie (Eds.), *The practitioner's handbook of team coaching* (pp. 138-149).
- Lawrence, P. & Whyte, A. (2017). What do experienced team coaches do? Current practice in Australia and New Zealand. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, 15(1), 94–113. Available at: <https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/5514ff53-2108-4f24-93d8-8968579710a9/1/>.
- Nevis, E. C. (2013). *Organizational consulting: A gestalt approach*. Taylor and Francis.
- Noon, R. (2018). Presence in executive coaching conversations: The C2 model. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, Special Issue 12, 4-20. DOI: 10.24384/000533.
- O'Broin, A. (2016). Where we have been, where we are now, and where we might be heading: Where next for the coaching relationship? *Coaching Psykologi: The Danish Journal of Coaching Psychology*, 5(1), 57–74. DOI: 10.5278/ojs.cp.v5i1.1686.
- Palmer, S., & McDowall, A. (2010). The coaching relationship: putting people first. In S. Palmer & A. McDowall (Eds.), *The coaching relationship: Putting people first*. Taylor and Francis.
- Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. (2014). A practical guide to using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne Psychological Journal*, 20(1). DOI: 10.14691/cppj.20.1.7.
- Porges, S. W. (2007). The polyvagal perspective. *Biological Psychology*, 74(2), 116–143. DOI: 10.1016/j.biopsycho.2006.06.009.
- Quintana, D. S., Guastella, A. J., Outhred, T., Hickie, I. B., & Kemp, A. H. (2012). Heart rate variability is associated with emotion recognition: Direct evidence for a relationship between the autonomic nervous system and social cognition. *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, 86(2), 168–172. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijpsycho.2012.08.012.
- Raimundo, C. A. (2020). Managing relational conflict by closing the intention and behavioural gap through the use of a 3 dimensional visualisation and simulation model. *Cogent Psychology*, 7(1). DOI: 10.1080/23311908.2020.1729592.
- Rajasinghe, D. (2020). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a coaching research methodology. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 13(2), 176–190. DOI: 10.1080/17521882.2019.1694554.
- Senge, P. M., Scharmer, C. O., Jaworski, J., & Flowers, B. S. (2005). *Presence: An exploration of profound change in people, organizations, and society*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Silsbee, D. (2019). Presence as coaching meta-competency. In S. English, J. M. Sabatine, & P. Brownell (Eds.), *Professional coaching: Principles and practice* (pp. 119-133). Springer Publishing Company.
- Siminovitch, D. (2017). *Presence and use of self*. In *A gestalt coaching primer: The path toward awareness IQ*. (pp. 105-141). Gestalt Coaching Works.
- Siminovitch, D., & Eron, A. (2008). The power of presence and intentional use of self: Coaching for awareness, choice and change. *International Journal of Coaching in Organisations*, 6(3), 90-111.
- Smith, J. A. (2011). Evaluating the contribution of interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Health Psychology Review*, 5(1), 9–27. DOI: 10.1080/17437199.2010.510659.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Stelter, R. (2014). Third generation coaching: Reconstructing dialogues through collaborative practice and a focus on values. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 9(1), 51-66.
- Stolorow, R. D. (1997). Dynamic, dyadic, inter subjective systems: An evolving paradigm for psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 14(3), 337–346. DOI: 10.1037/h0079729.
- Thornton, C. (2019). The making of a team coach. In D. Clutterbuck, J. Gannon, S. Hayes, I. Iordanou, K. Lowe, & D. Mackie (Eds.), *The practitioner's handbook of team coaching* (pp. 321–330). Routledge.
- Tull, M. (2021, April 16). *Grounding Techniques for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Using the Five Senses to Cope*. Verywellmind. Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/grounding-techniques-for-ptsd-2797300>.
- Widdowson, L., & Barbour, P. (2021). *Building top performing teams*. Kogan Page.
- Williams, B. (2015). Enhancing teaching relationships through therapeutic use of self. *Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice*, 10(1), 61–70. DOI: 10.1108/JMHTEP-04-2014-0008.
- Wotruba, S. (2016). Leadership Team Coaching: A trust-based coaching relationship. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, S10, 98-109. Available at: <https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/d1de3c0e-87a8-4181-9b53-894103a16f19/1/>.

Woudstra, G. (2021). *The art of team coaching: A comprehensive guide to unleashing the power, purpose and potential in any team*. Team Coaching Studio Press.

Zak, P. (2018). *Trust factor*. AMACOM.

## About the authors

**Sebastian Fox** is an executive and team coach who works with leadership teams to help improve performance through enabling teams to develop awareness around what is holding them back. He is Head of Research at the Team Coaching Studio, a provider of development programmes for team coaches.