

Conceptualizing the Distinctiveness of Digital Team Coaching: Organisational Boundaries and Practical Implications

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Abstract

The increasing dependence of organizations on the digital environment has led to more frequent use of team coaching. Despite this, the concept remains undefined and is often confused with other types of technology-based interventions. This creates ambiguity in both academic and professional contexts. The literature acknowledges the rapid adoption of digital and virtual tools in coaching but emphasizes the need for conceptual clarity about the differences between digital team coaching practices and other online team approaches. This study proposes a qualitative, experience-based research model. Twelve accredited team coaches from Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States participated in semi-structured interviews. Participants had varying levels of professional experience. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis to explore how practitioners conceptualise and apply digital team coaching in their work. The results revealed five significant themes. Firstly, the digital environment was identified as a key factor in shaping the team coaching process. Secondly, practitioners emphasised the differences between face-to-face and digitally mediated team coaching. Thirdly, the need for specific digital skills was identified for both team coaches and participants. Fourthly, the study distinguished between digital team coaching and AI-assisted models. Fifthly, it is imperative that digital tools are used ethically in team coaching. By clarifying the differences between digital, online, virtual and technology-assisted coaching, this research establishes a common vocabulary in the literature.

Keywords

Artificial intelligence (AI) coaching; Digital team coaching; Online coaching; Qualitative research; Team development; Technology-mediated interventions; Virtual teams.

Introduction

Against the backdrop of an increasingly complex organizational environment, team coaching has become a popular intervention. Unlike individual coaching, which focuses on the personal development of team members, team coaching emphasizes collective reflection, improved communication, and the achievement of common goals set by the team as a whole. (Jones, Woods, & Guillaume, 2016). Team coaching is considered the most creative and dynamic approach to team formation and functioning. (Lawrence, 2017). Therefore, a thorough analysis is necessary to address the controversies and challenges that arise in this context.

Researchers and practitioners concur that team coaching is frequently misinterpreted as other organisational interventions, including team training, team building, facilitation, and other forms of team development. Several studies (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Klein et al., 2009; Jones, Napiersky, & Lyubovnikova, 2019) argues that these forms of intervention are short-term in nature, with a focus on well-structured learning, team dynamics, or defining and implementing team processes, team coaching considers the entire system to which the team and its members are part, employing a recursive approach.

In the aftermath of the global pandemic, organisations are increasingly reliant on geographically dispersed and hybrid teams to address the novel challenges that have emerged. This has led to an increase in the degree of complexity and interdependence on a global scale. Consequently, digitization has become necessary and a priority for all companies. As a result, the traditional face-to-face team coaching is gradually being replaced by digital and hybrid models. This change has given rise to a

multitude of opportunities but also to a series of questions and constraints related to this new mode of intervention. Therefore, traditional team coaching, based on face-to-face meetings, is gradually transitioning to a digital or hybrid format.

In the current context of uncertainty and complexity, maintaining cohesion, trust and effective communication has become a priority, as demonstrated by the research of Driskell, Salas, and Driskell (2018) and Amy C. Edmondson (2002). However, Weimann, Schlieter, and Brendel (2022) highlight increasing ambiguity in the literature caused by the terms digital, online, virtual, and artificial intelligence-assisted. Despite the significant differences in usage, both terms are used interchangeably. Thus, the term "AI-assisted coaching" could refer to human coaching with algorithmic support from an artificial intelligence system, as well as fully automated coaching based on artificial intelligence with autonomous coaching agents. In this context, clarifying how digital team coaching is understood and practised becomes necessary (Broetje, Bauer, & Jenny, 2022; Spielhofer & Motschnig, 2024). Additionally, the literature emphasises that the integration of digital tools, artificial intelligence and non-human agents has a significant impact on the design and measurement of team interventions (Roberts et al., 2022; Carney et al., 2021).

A thematic analysis was conducted based on 12 semi-structured interviews with experts in the field, with varying experience in this area, to clarify the distinctions among digital, online, virtual, and AI team coaching. The present study makes two key contributions to the existing body of knowledge. Firstly, it provides an operational vocabulary that facilitates comparative research between studies by researchers. Secondly, it provides practitioners with clear guidance on designing and delivering effective technology-mediated team coaching interventions.

Literature review

Differentiating team coaching from other team development practices

Although the existing literature distinguishes team coaching from other forms of team development, such as team training, team building, and team development, the distinction in the digital environment remains underdiscussed. Team training is defined as the systematic acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes considered essential for the effective performance of tasks and the promotion of effective teamwork (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). In the context of organisational behaviour, team building is an intervention within a team that emphasises interpersonal dynamics, role clarity, and collaborative problem-solving (Klein et al., 2009). Conversely, team development as a whole can be defined as the study of broader consolidation processes that are designed to strengthen work structures and social systems (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006).

Conceptualizing team coaching

In team coaching, the team is viewed as a system composed of complex components that facilitate reflection, awareness, and trust-building through interactive processes, without the transfer of expertise or knowledge from the coach (Jones et al., 2019; Jacobson, N., Butterill, D., & Goering, P., 2004). Despite studies examining the factors influencing the efficiency and outcomes of teamwork (Carney et al., 2021; Maseko, van Wyk, & Odendaal, 2019; Rousseau, Aube, & Tremblay, 2013). Most studies are from before the widespread digitization of the labor market. A recent study defines teams as complex socio-technical systems and emphasizes the importance of measuring them multidimensionally. Thus, Roberts et al. (2022) emphasize integrating digital tracking data into the team-coaching process to improve understanding and teamwork. Thus, the use of digital technologies is becoming increasingly widespread in team coaching. At the same time, other studies have examined participants' perceptions of tool use as a moderating factor in the acceptance and implementation of coaching interventions (Giusino et al., 2023). It is evident that the existing literature on digitally augmented coaching practices lacks clarity and explicitness in conceptualizing digital, online, and virtual team coaching. This state of affairs gives rise to a certain conceptual ambiguity in the scientific literature.

AI-assisted and autonomous coaching for teams

A recent review of the literature on artificial intelligence (AI) reveals that its use as a comprehensive team-coaching instrument is less prevalent than its use as a support tool. A study that is not specific to the organizational environment but rather to the medical environment analyzes how a team of nurses is supported by a tool called "wecoach," which facilitates polling and steps without requiring a comprehensive team-coaching process (Broetje, Bauer, & Jenny, 2022). Conceptual analyses in the existing literature distinguish AI from e-learning or nudging, highlighting certain coaching functions of the platforms, while also addressing challenges related to the facilitation process (Graßmann & Schermuly, 2020).

Terminology gaps

There is some confusion in the literature regarding the terminology used to refer to team coaching in the digital environment. Thus, the terms "digital" and "online" both refer to the mode of delivery, while "virtual" refers to both remote delivery and the virtual nature of team members. In addition, the term AI primarily refers to the AI tools used during the coaching process rather than to autonomous coaching agents (Giusino et al., 2023; Spielhofer & Motschnig, 2024; Weimann, Schlieter, & Brendel, 2022; Broetje, Bauer, & Jenny, 2022). However, the literature offers some clarification on the distinction between human-led and AI-led coaching, as well as between digital and autonomous delivery modes (Weimann, Schlieter, & Brendel, 2022; Graßmann & Schermuly, 2020).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, exploratory, and inductive approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) to investigate how professional team coaches define and differentiate digital team coaching. The objective of this study is to examine how accredited team coaches conceptualise digital team coaching (DTC) and distinguish it from related technology-mediated practices. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions: How is digital team coaching defined? How does digital team coaching differ from face-to-face team coaching? How does digital team coaching differ from AI-assisted team coaching?

Nineteen experienced coaches were invited via LinkedIn, telephone, and email, of whom 12 agreed to participate in this study. All met the predefined inclusion criteria (Flick, 2022), as they had the necessary qualifications in team coaching and professional accreditations from recognized coaching bodies. The participants' professional experience ranged from 6 months to 36 years (average: 12,71 years). Seven participants were women, and five were men; ten were based in Europe, one in the United States, and one in the United Kingdom. A *table* example is presented in Table 1. Initially, participants assessed their familiarity with digital team coaching by answering a question about their experience with it. The level was assessed on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all, 2 = very little, 3 = little, 4 = high, 5 = very high). Of those interviewed, two reported a familiarity level of "5", four reported "4", two reported "3", three reported "2", and one reported "1", with an average of 3.25. A *table* example is presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Profile of respondents (N=12)

<i>ID</i>	<i>Accreditation / Education level</i>	<i>Professional experience (years)</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Region</i>
I1	ICF – Associate Certified Coach (ACC), Individual Coach; ICF Advanced Certified Team Coach (ACTC)	<1 (0.5 years)	F	Europe
I2	Master in HR, EMCC Practitioner Coach, and Professional Team Coach	3	M	Europe
I3	ICF – Professional Certified Coach (PCC), Individual Coach; Advanced Certified Team Coach (ACTC)	7	F	Europe
I4	Postgraduate in Leadership & Coaching; ICF Professional Certified Coach (PCC), Individual Coach; ICF Advanced Certified Team Coach (ACTC)	12	M	UK

I5	EMCC – Senior Practitioner and Professional Team Coach	15	F	Europe
I6	ICF – Associate Certified Coach (ACC), Individual Coach; ICF Advanced Certified Team Coach (ACTC)	2	F	Europe
I7	PhD in Organisational Psychology; ICF Advanced Certified Team Coach (ACTC)	20	M	Europe
I8	ICF – Master Certified Coach (MCC), Individual Coach; Advanced Certified Team Coach (ACTC)	25	F	Europe
I9	Master in HR; EMCC Practitioner, Individual Coach; ICF Associate Certified Coach (ACC), Individual Coach; ICF Advanced Certified Team Coach (ACTC)	9	F	USA
I10	ICF – Professional Certified Coach (PCC), Individual Coach; Advanced Certified Team Coach (ACTC)	5	M	Europe
I11	ICF – Professional Certified Coach (PCC), Individual Coach; Advanced Certified Team Coach (ACTC)	18	F	Europe
I12	ICF – Master Certified Coach (MCC), Individual Coach; Advanced Certified Team Coach (ACTC)	36	M	Europe

Note. All participants had been involved in a coaching environment for several years before formally working as coaches.

Source: Authors' research results/contribution

Table 2. Familiarity level with the concept: digital team coaching

<i>Familiarity Level</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Number of Participants</i>
1	Not at all	1
2	Very little	3
3	Somewhat little	2
4	High	4
5	Very high	2
Average	—	3.25

Source: Authors' research results/contribution

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom between July 2025 and August 2025. The interviews lasted between 17 and 28 minutes (mean = 22 minutes) and were guided by open-ended questions modeled after (Jones, Napiersky, & Lyubovnikova, 2019). Thus, in line with the initial questions about team coaching: "How do you define team coaching?"; "How does team coaching differ from individual coaching?" and "How does digital team coaching differ from other team development interventions?". The questions asked in the interviews were: "How do you define digital team coaching?"; "How does digital team coaching differ from face-to-face team coaching?" and "How does digital team coaching differ from AI-assisted team coaching?".

Depending on the answers received, other exploratory questions were asked on a case-by-case basis, depending on the context. All interviews were recorded using the transcription function in the Zoom communication application. The data were then analyzed thematically. This resulted in the initial definition of 19 codes, which were grouped into five themes, as follows (Braun & Clarke, 2023): (1) The role of the digital environment as a mediator in the process of team coaching; (2) The differences between the online and face-to-face team coaching models; (3) The necessary digital skills; (4) The differences between digital team coaching and AI-assisted team coaching; (5) Ethical considerations.

Flick (2022) argues that the ethical component is essential, especially in qualitative research. Therefore, all participants gave their consent to participate in this study voluntarily. They also agreed to use the zoom transcription application for the interviews. Confidentiality was ensured by replacing the participants' names with coded pseudonyms, numbered from I1 to I12. The collected data were stored securely, and ethical approval for the study was obtained.

Results and discussion

Following an in-depth analysis of the interview data, the themes that emerged were grouped into five major, interconnected categories. The analysis also highlights the challenges posed by technology and the ethical implications that may arise.

Theme 1: The role of the digital environment as a mediator in the process of team coaching

Most study participants consider digital team coaching to be a team coaching process that takes place in an online environment, using video, online, or visual channels. 8 of 12 participants indicated the need to adapt team-coaching interventions to the digital environment. Five participants highlighted the synchronous nature of the intervention, emphasizing that it requires a joint meeting in real time. As I8 expressed, *"It is a meeting with the members of a team at the same time; it cannot be conducted asynchronously."*

It is important to note that the use of the term 'digital' is not confined to 'online', 'digital', 'virtual', or 'computer-assisted'. A number of participants (I2, I5, I6) have described the process as an online team-coaching intervention, using the phrase *"...it takes place online."* Conversely, others (I3, I9) have opted for the term "digital", *".....as a team coaching with digital tools"*, whereas I1, referred to as "virtual", is of increasing importance in this field, *"As a meeting in a virtual environment"*. Another aspect highlighted in the definition is the use of technology before, during, and after the team coaching meeting. As I7 mentioned *"The integration of collaboration platforms, chat, and feedback tools is part of DTC...not just video meetings"*, I3 mentioned *"...scheduling tools and calendar reminders,"* I2 mentioned *"... questionnaires and preparatory materials are sent out before the meeting"*, I4 mentioned *"between sessions, a briefing is held on what has happened"* and I9 mentioned *"technology helps to track the progress of the team coaching process."*

Theme 2: The differences between the online and face-to-face team coaching models

The majority of participants noted the discrepancy between this method and traditional face-to-face team coaching, with a particular emphasis on the merits of technological integration. I1 mentioned *"... it's not face-to-face team coaching"*; I3 mentioned *"...it's something else"*; I5 mentioned *"...there are many things that are done differently"*; I7 mentioned *"... the basis is the same, but it's done differently."* The interviewees emphasised the accessibility and flexibility of the meetings. The following statements were made by participants in the study: I1 mentioned that *"I can join from anywhere, ...it's much easier to meet on Zoom than to travel somewhere"*, I2 mentioned *"I can work with distributed teams, even hybrid ones"*, and I9 mentioned *"we synchronise much faster on Zoom"*. A further aspect emphasized was the lower cost and greater efficiency of the digital team coaching process compared to face-to-face team coaching. As I5 mentioned, *"It is not necessary for me to rent a space for the entire team. I no longer incur travel costs,"* and I7 mentioned, *"My costs have decreased significantly."* The interviewees also highlighted several disadvantages. I7 mentioned *"it is difficult to read the participants' non-verbal cues"*, I8 mentioned *"I noticed a different team dynamic in the online environment compared to face-to-face meetings,"* and I9 mentioned *"...lower focus and attention of the participants in the meeting."* It was also noted that there were potential technology-related issues. I2 mentioned *"...I often experienced Teams not working or me or one of the participants not having a signal..."*, I3 mentioned *"...not all participants are familiar with the digital environment..."*. Another aspect is the time it takes to build a relationship, which is absolutely necessary in a team-coaching process. Related to this, I5 mentioned *"It is much harder to build a relationship of trust with the team..."* and I7 mentioned *"...their involvement is lower"*. Participants also noted the shorter duration of the meetings. I1 said *"...the meetings are definitely shorter, ...it's difficult to keep them in front of the screen for a whole day"* and I4 mentioned *"...we see each other more often and the meetings are shorter."* Consequently, digital team coaching is more accessible to a greater number of companies than face-to-face coaching, with lower costs, fewer communication and usage issues, and more frequent meetings.

Theme 3: The necessary digital skills

The majority of interviewees emphasised the need for specific digital competencies among coaches to facilitate team coaching processes in the digital environment. Related to this, I3 mentioned "...I learned to use Zoom, Teams, Miro, and other digital tools" and I9 said that "I took courses on digital tools....it's a specialization beyond team coaching knowledge." It was further emphasised by some that specific digital knowledge is an essential prerequisite for participants in digital team coaching: I2 said that "Not everyone knows how to use Miro or other tools", I6 said that "Not everyone has access to a computer" and I8 mentioned that "I work with teams that only want to meet face-to-face because they are teams that don't use technology...it's not for every team". It is therefore vital to emphasise the need to introduce specific digital competencies into occupational and professional standards in this field. It is incumbent upon professional associations to incorporate these competencies as a fundamental element of their assessment of professional coaches during the certification process.

Theme 4: The differences between digital team coaching and AI-assisted team coaching

The majority of interviewees clearly distinguished between team coaching that uses technology and AI-assisted coaching. Interviewee I1 mentioned that "It's not the same thing to log into Zoom or talk to a chatbot...". I4 emphasized the difference between using AI tools in team coaching practice, stating, "In the future, it will be necessary to use such AI-assisted tools in our practice...." The majority of interviewees regarded AI as a mediator, a tool to be utilised within the team coaching process. I3 mentioned "... It helps me on Zoom and Teams to summarize the discussion and extract the main ideas" and I5 mentioned "...we are surrounded by AI, it will be part of our practice." Furthermore, I6 explicitly emphasized their concern about the emergence of AI as a replacement for technology: "...those at the beginning of their career may be replaced." However, only two respondents expressed a positive outlook, underlining the notion of a natural progression: I3 mentioned "...it's normal, we have to adapt and take advantage of technological evolution.". It can be concluded that the majority of interviewees consider digital team coaching and AI team coaching to be two different concepts. However, there is also a recognition of concern regarding the accelerated technological evolution in this area of AI.

Theme 5: Ethical considerations

The majority of interviewees (nine out of 12) raised concerns regarding potential ethical violations related to confidentiality, data storage, and personal responsibility when using technology in the team coaching process, I3 referred to: "Where is the data stored on these platforms?" and I5 mentioned that "customers need confidentiality guarantees." In addition, I9 explicitly mentioned that the absence of regulations in the field of data is essential: "there is no clear regulation of digital team coaching", I6 mentioned "...who says what tools you can or cannot use..." and I8 mentioned that "...there is no clear regulation." These points of view highlight the need for robust ethical frameworks and professional standards for team coaching in digital contexts. Examples are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Themes, main points, and examples from interview analysis

Themes	Main points	Examples
1. The role of the digital environment as a mediator in the process of team coaching	Digital team coaching takes place in an online environment, using video/visual channels, integrates digital tools, emphasizes reflection, is a synchronous process, and utilizes technology before, during, and after sessions.	"It is a meeting with the members of a team at the same time; it cannot be conducted asynchronously."(I8); "it takes place online" (I2,I5,I6); "as a team coaching with digital tools" (I3, I9) ; "As a meeting in a virtual environment"(I1) "The integration of collaboration platforms, chat, and feedback tools is part of DTC...not just video meetings"(I7); "...scheduling tools and calendar reminders,"(I3); "... questionnaires and preparatory materials are sent out before the meeting"(I2); "between sessions, a briefing is held on what has happened"(I4); "technology helps to track the progress of the team

coaching process."(I9);

"... it's not face-to-face team coaching"(I1);

"...it's something else"(I3);

"...there are many things that are done differently"(I5);

"...the basis is the same, but it's done differently."(I7)

"I can join from anywhere,... it's much easier to meet on Zoom than to travel somewhere"(I1);

"I can work with distributed teams, even hybrid ones"(I2);

"we synchronise much faster on Zoom"(I9);

"It is not necessary for me to rent a space for the entire team. I no longer incur travel costs"(I5);

"My costs have decreased significantly."(I7);

:"... it is difficult to read the participants' non-verbal cues"(I7);

"I noticed a different team dynamic in the online environment compared to face-to-face meetings"(I8);

"...lower focus and attention of the participants in the meeting."(I9);

"...I often experienced Teams not working or me or one of the participants not having a signal"(I2);

"...not all participants are familiar with the digital environment..."(I3);

"It is much harder to build a relationship of trust with the team..."(I5);

"...their involvement is lower"(I7);

"...the meetings are definitely shorter,...it's difficult to keep them in front of the screen for a whole day"(I1);

"...we see each other more often and the meetings are shorter."(I4).

"...I learned to use Zoom, Teams, Miro, and other digital tools"(I3);

"I took courses on digital tools..it's a specialization beyond team coaching knowledge."(I9);

"Not everyone knows how to use Miro or other tools"(I2);

"Not everyone has access to a computer"(I6);

"I work with teams that only want to meet face-to-face because they are teams that don't use technology"...it's not for every team"(I9).

"It's not the same thing to log into Zoom or talk to a chatbot..."(I1);

"In the future, it will be necessary to use such AI-assisted tools in our practice..."(I4);

"... It helps me on Zoom and Teams to summarize the discussion and extract the main ideas"(I3);

"...we are surrounded by AI, it will be part of our practice."(I5);

"...those at the beginning of their career may be replaced"(I6);

"...it's normal, we have to adapt and take advantage of technological evolution."(I3).

"Where is the data stored on these platforms?..." (I3);

"Customers need confidentiality guarantees"(I5);

"...there is no clear regulation of digital team coaching"(I9), "...who says what tools you can or cannot use..."(I6);

"...there is no clear regulation."(I18).

the team... it's a structured process with clear objectives and reflection.";

"Many think it's online training. Digital coaching is more,

		means creating reflective space, even via technology"; <i>"It is a meeting with the members of a team at the same time; it cannot be conducted asynchronously. ";</i> <i>" it takes place online";</i> <i>"as a team coaching with digital tools"; "The integration of collaboration platforms, chat, and feedback tools is part of DTC...not just video meetings";</i> <i>"...scheduling tools and calendar reminders, ", "... questionnaires and preparatory materials are sent out before the meeting";</i> <i>"between sessions, a briefing is held on what has happened";</i> <i>"technology helps to track the progress of the team coaching process."</i>
2. Differences between online coaching and face-to-face coaching for teams	Digital team coaching differs from face-to-face interaction. At the same time, it offers accessibility, flexibility, cost reduction, and efficiency. In terms of challenges, these include weaker nonverbal cues, reduced participant engagement, potential technical issues, and slower trust building. Most also pointed out that sessions are shorter.	<i>"... it's not face-to-face team coaching";</i> <i>"...it's something else";</i> <i>"...there are many things that are done differently,";</i> <i>"...the basis is the same, but it's done differently."</i> <i>"I can join from anywhere";</i> <i>"it's much easier to meet on Zoom than to travel somewhere";</i> <i>"I can work with distributed teams, even hybrid ones";</i> <i>"we synchronise much faster on Zoom";</i> <i>"It is not necessary for me to rent a space for the entire team";</i> <i>"I no longer incur travel costs";</i> <i>"My costs have decreased significantly."</i> <i>:"... it is difficult to read the participants' non-verbal cues";</i> <i>"I noticed a different team dynamic in the online environment compared to face-to-face meetings";</i> <i>"...lower focus and attention of the participants in the meeting.";</i> <i>"...I often experienced Teams not working or me or one of the participants not having a signal";</i> <i>"...not all participants are familiar with the digital environment...";</i> <i>"It is much harder to build a relationship of trust with the team...";</i> <i>"...their involvement is lower";</i> <i>"...the meetings are definitely shorter";</i> <i>"...it's difficult to keep them in front of the screen for a whole day";</i> <i>"...we see each other more often and the meetings are shorter."</i>
3. Specific digital skills are required	Team coaches and participants must be proficient in the use of digital tools. The need for professional standards that include digital skills	<i>"...I learned to use Zoom, Teams, Miro, and other digital tools";</i> <i>"I took courses on digital tools...";</i> <i>"...it's a specialization beyond team coaching knowledge."</i> <i>"Not everyone knows how to use Miro or other tools";</i> <i>"Not everyone has access to a computer";</i> <i>"I work with teams that only want to meet face-to-face because they are teams that don't use technology"...it's not for every team"</i>
4. Differences between digital team coaching and AI-assisted coaching	Digital team coaching differs from AI-assisted coaching. It is considered a supportive mediator (summarizing, extracting ideas), but	<i>"It's not the same thing to log into Zoom or talk to a chatbot...";</i> <i>"In the future, it will be necessary to use such AI-assisted tools in our practice....";</i> <i>"... It helps me on Zoom and Teams to summarize the discussion and extract the main ideas";</i> <i>"...we are surrounded by AI, it will be part of our practice."</i>

5. Ethical considerations	at the same time there are concerns that AI could replace coaches at the beginning of their careers. However, some believe that the adoption of AI is inevitable and only a matter of time. Concerns about confidentiality, data storage, lack of regulation; need for robust ethical frameworks and adapted professional standards.	"...those at the beginning of their career may be replaced"; "...it's normal, we have to adapt and take advantage of technological evolution." "Where is the data stored on these platforms?..."; "Customers need confidentiality guarantees"; "...there is no clear regulation of digital team coaching"; "...who says what tools you can or cannot use..."; "...there is no clear regulation."
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Source: Authors' research results/contribution

A thematic analysis of the mind map in Figure 1, outlining themes and key points in digital team coaching, reveals 19 initial codes distributed across five main themes: Digital environment as a mediator, Digital vs AI – Assisted Coaching, Online vs face-to-face, Necessary digital skills, and Ethical considerations. It is evident that the following initial codes are particularly salient in relation to the theme of the Digital environment as a mediator: *use of tools (e.g., chat, scheduling, feedback); synchronous meetings; online/video channels; and reflective space*. This paper outlines the methodology for digital team coaching in an online environment using video/visual channels. The majority of interviewees recognise the integration of digital tools, emphasising reflection, synchronous process, and technology before, during, and after sessions, according to Table 3.

The second theme we can observe in the mind map is Digital Team Coaching versus Artificial Intelligence-Assisted Team Coaching. The analysis revealed four sub-themes, which were grouped and coded as follows: *It is not the same thing, Artificial Intelligence is a support tool, Fear of replacement, and the need to adapt to evolution*. This classification demonstrates once again that digital team coaching is not equivalent to Artificial Intelligence-assisted team coaching, as it is more of a support mediator in the team coaching process. Some perceive AI adoption as inevitable. Concerns have been expressed about AI replacing early-career coaches.

Within the third theme, online team coaching versus face-to-face team coaching, the following sub-themes were identified and coded, as shown in the minmap: *cost reduction, shorter sessions, weaker nonverbal cues, accessibility, and flexibility*. These reveal that online team coaching interventions generate lower costs for participants, offer the flexibility to join from anywhere using an online communication tool, but at the same time make it more difficult to build trust and to interpret and observe participants' nonverbal cues. Also, the sessions are shorter to keep participants' attention during the process.

In the fourth theme, Necessary digital skills, the themes are grouped under the initial codes: *coach competencies (Zoom, Miro, etc.), participants' digital literacy, and the standard to be adopted*. Thus, the interviewees emphasized the need to use digital tools in the team coaching process and the importance of specific digital skills for both coaches and program participants.

The final theme to be considered is the basis for ethical considerations. This theme comprises four sub-themes, grouped and coded as follows: *data storage, confidentiality, the need for a framework, and lack of regulation*. These sub-themes address concerns about confidentiality, data storage, lack of regulation, the need for robust ethical frameworks, and appropriate professional standards.

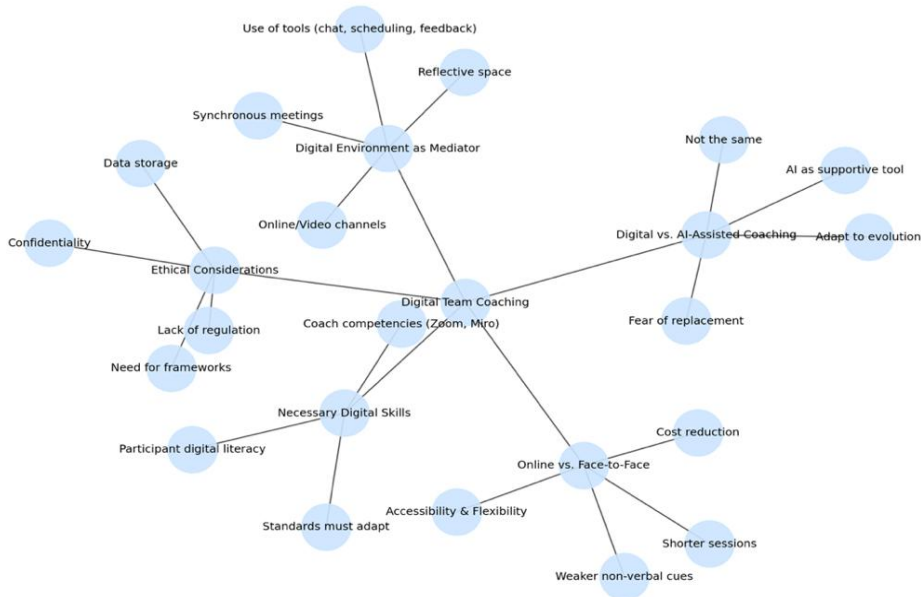


Figure 1. Mind map of themes and key points in digital team coaching

Source: Authors' research results/contribution

The findings of this study underscore the necessity to elucidate the concept of DTC. Digital team coaching is often confused with other forms of digital team interventions, such as digital training, facilitation, or AI-assisted team coaching. After analyzing the responses from study participants, we can define digital team coaching as a structured, reflective, and technology-mediated process rather than a simple transposition of traditional face-to-face team coaching into an online environment. We can also say that DTC is more accessible than face-to-face team coaching, with lower logistical costs and greater flexibility for participants. In addition to the advantages mentioned, the study also highlights certain disadvantages of DTG, including difficulties in interpreting nonverbal communication, potential technical problems, and the longer time required to build trust in team coaching meetings.

The study also highlights the lack of specific digital skills in professional standards and international certification processes. The effective use of videoconferencing platforms, such as Zoom and Teams, as well as interactive tools like Miro and Mural, and feedback and other team performance assessment tools, represents an additional specialization that complements basic coaching skills. Another important finding is the distinction between DTC and AI-assisted coaching. Consequently, AI-assisted tools with specific functions for summarizing discussions, analyzing communication, evaluating, and monitoring processes can be useful when integrated into team coaching practice as a complement to the human factor. However, there is a risk that AI will replace coaches in the future, especially for early-career professionals. Consequently, the integration of AI into coaching requires a critical and constructive attitude from all stakeholders involved, who should value its complementary potential rather than its potential to replace human coaches.

In this field of technology, ethical issues are a central dimension of the discussions. Data confidentiality, information storage, the lack of clear regulations, and responsibility for the use of digital technologies are major issues raised by practitioners. This highlights the need for a legislative framework adapted to the digital context.

Conclusions

This article contributes to clarifying the terminology related to the concept of Digital Team Coaching. The study distinguishes DTC from other digital interventions in organizational teams, providing a useful vocabulary for both researchers and practitioners.

Another key finding is the need for coaches and teams participating in such a programme to develop specific digital skills, which requires adapting professional standards and certification processes accordingly. At the same time, responsible integration of AI presents opportunities for all stakeholders in the digital team coaching process, but also poses implementation challenges, emphasising the importance of maintaining the central role of the human coach. Furthermore, developing clear ethical and regulatory standards that address the challenges posed by digitalisation will protect both coaches and organisational clients involved in DTC processes. This study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of and practice in digital team coaching, opening up new avenues of research and supporting the development of sustainable, future-oriented professional practices.

The first limitation of the study stems from its exploratory nature and the use of only 12 participants, which does not allow generalization of the findings. Second, there is a geographical and cultural bias, with most respondents coming from Europe, which may affect the diversity of perspectives. At the same time, the collected data are practitioners' subjective perceptions, without triangulation with data from beneficiaries, organizations, or other stakeholders. Furthermore, the study captures the situation at a given moment and does not provide a longitudinal perspective on the evolution of digital team coaching. Finally, due to the rapid evolution of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, the conclusions drawn today may become partially outdated in a relatively short time.

Therefore, for the future, we recommend studies that compare different cultural contexts in order to capture the contextual differences they create, longitudinal studies to track the impact of digital technology on team coaching, and studies on the integration of artificial intelligence into team coaching to assess its potential to support or modify team coaching processes. Thus, research opens up new areas of exploration regarding how digitalization and AI will remodel coaching practices and how relationships are built within organizational teams.

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