A study of coaching leadership style practice in projects

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to describe and discuss how project managers practice a coaching leadership style (CLS).

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is based on a case study of an organization practicing coaching in projects.

Findings – The research findings show that to succeed with a CLS, project managers must have a large toolbox, which includes signature strengths, self-management and a give culture. Further, the paper describes how a model consisting of two learning processes can help to implement a CLS in practice.

Research limitations/implications – This study is exploratory, contributing to the development of a substantive theory. Theory testing as well as more in-depth investigation of mental models of a CLS would be valuable.

Practical implications – Coaching leadership theories offer insights that can be leveraged to make project management more effective through improved research foundations.

Originality/value – This paper focuses on how a CLS is carried out in projects and how it can be improved and should thus be of interest to managers searching for tools and models for effective leadership.

Keywords
Project management, Leadership, Coaching

1. Introduction

Managing projects is unquestionably a difficult job. It requires a leader who can manage a singular but complex event that consists of a multifaceted range of activities. The project manager's responsibility is to plan, organize, staff, monitor, evaluate, control and lead the project team, from project inception to final completion and success. This job involves diverse challenges, such as coping with a complex project environment, dealing with problems across functional lines, handling conflicts and managing change. One of a project manager's most important core tasks is managing the team (Zwikael and Unger-Aviram, 2010). Often project teams are composed of a mixture of specialists, fulfilling specific roles with varying accountability relationships to the project manager. According to Ng and Walker (2008), this complex interplay of power, influence, accountability and responsiveness makes the task of coordinating, leading and inspiring the project team difficult. Against this background, Pinto

and Kharbanda (1996, p. 52) underscore leadership as an 'essential ingredient in project success'. This endeavour requires not only sophisticated management tools and special behavioural consideration but also the development of leadership skills. Fisher (2011) and Dainty et al. (2005) call for further research and new insights into the need for new and improved people skills and associated behaviours for project managers. Jacques et al. (2008, p. 5) elaborate: 'Given the role of project management in success of an organization, it is therefore most surprising that the literature says little in terms of recognizing and analyzing the leadership style of project managers'. However, some recent studies focus on more advanced leadership theories such as transformational leadership (Clarke, 2010; Strang, 2005; Tyssen et al., 2014).

Besides the challenges mentioned above, many project managers and project teams experience time pressure and stress due to tight deadlines given by project clients (Gevers et al., 2001). The result is a strong leadership focus on meeting delivery deadlines, however this may have negative effects on team reflection, learning and development. Mulec and Roth (2005) argue for coaching as a means for increased learning and reflection in projects. This view corresponds with Downey's (2003) definition of coaching as 'the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another'. Withmore (2010) suggests an alternative definition: 'Coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximize their own performance'. For the purpose of this article, we endorse the position hold by Downey (2003) since it highlights the reflection and learning dimension. We also adhere to Withmore's (2010) view that learning and personal development has an effect on performance. This is in line with prior research results, for example, Mulec and Roth (2005) found that coaching interventions have a positive effect on project team performance. However, despite the emerging academic interest in coaching (i.e. Hurt and Thomas, 2009) and increasingly firm utilisation of it, there is still a shortage of empirical research evaluating the practice of coaching (Ely et al, 2010; Mulec and Roth, 2005; Kilburg, 2001).

This paper contributes to the theory and practice of coaching by examining how project managers practice a coaching leadership style (CLS). We investigate the many facets of a CLS and how coaching can help the project manager cope with various challenges. Specifically, we address tools and techniques that can be learned and implemented to improve a CLS in practice. We aim to provide project managers, project owners, practitioners and researchers with a fine-grained investigation of how a CLS is carried out in projects and how it can be improved.

2. Leadership theories

According to Sosik and Jung (2010), many scholars have been preoccupied by the search for the optimum leadership profile or most effective style. As a result, many leadership theories have emerged, such as the trait theories (Derue et al., 2011; Zaccaro et al., 2004), contingency theory (Fielder, 1978), behavioural theory (Conger and Kanungo, 1987) and relationship theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). In this literature review, we focus on three theories: situational leadership theory, full range leadership development theory and coaching leadership theory. We chose this framework because these literature streams conceptualize the leader as a coach and address the development of a CLS. This framework also reflects outcomes related to the knowledge, skills, behaviour and tools for effective leadership.

2.1 Situational leadership theory

Since Ken Blanchard and Paul Hersey launched the theory of situational leadership in the 1960s, it has become one of the most commonly used leadership theories. In short, the theory posits that to be effective, a leader must adapt his or her leadership style to the situation; it is

not enough for project managers to implement a 'one-size-fits-all' leadership style, because employees are unique and work differently in different situations.

Hersey and Blanchard's (1996) situational leadership I model identifies four basic leadership styles: directing, selling, participating and delegating. The situational leadership I model subsequently evolved to the situational leadership II model, in which the leadership styles are coaching, delegating, supporting and directing (Blanchard, 2007). Coaching is particularly effective when the employee lacks the necessary skills and knowledge and when commitment and motivation are low. It is based on two-way communication (Blanchard, 2007): The manager praises and supports employees so that they can develop self-confidence, initiative and commitment to do the job, while also challenging employees to ask questions, make suggestions and learn from the process.

Goleman (2004) posits that to achieve the best results, leaders should use elements from six leadership styles based on various components of emotional intelligence, depending on the situation. One of these leadership styles is coaching, in which the key purpose is to develop the individual employee's resource base.

Situational leadership has advantages in terms of its ease of use, simplicity and intuitive appeal. It recognizes leaders' need for flexibility and the importance of followers as determinants of leader behaviour. However, Sosik and Jung (2010) indicate that many leadership experts have criticized situational leadership theory, citing, for example, its lack of support from rigorous scientific research. Other negative aspects of this theory are that outside factors are ignored, and it fails to account for demographic differences in leaders and followers that may influence its effectiveness across situations.

2.2 Full range leadership development theory

Numerous researchers have tested and investigated Burns's (1978) full range leadership theory. Avolio and Bass (2004) propose a full range leadership theory that consists of three basic constructs—laissez-faire, transactional and transformational—representing distinct leadership styles. They note that the transformational leadership style includes four behaviours: (1) *idealized influence*, in which the leader serves as role model; (2) *inspirational motivation*, in which the leader encourages, inspires and motivates; (3) *intellectual stimulation*, in which the leader stimulates followers' creativity; and (4) *individual consideration*, in which the leader shows concern for the subordinates.

Individual consideration means that the manager views employees as individuals with different needs, abilities and aspirations. The manager emphasizes listening to each one, appreciating their uniqueness and helping them develop their strengths and talents. Individualized consideration means that the leader shows empathy, values individual needs and encourages continuous improvements (Sosik and Jung, 2010). This kind of behaviour has its parallel in coaching.

2.3 Coaching leadership theory

Although much has been written about coaching, relatively little of it addresses what a CLS entails (Cox et al., 2010). In addition, research is lacking about the outcomes of a CLS (Cox et al., 2010). Nonetheless, CLS is included as an important part of several established leadership theories (Bass and Avolio, 1994; Blanchard, 2007). For example, Meyers (2012) argues that CLS helps employees develop personally and with a long-term perspective. The leader supports and challenges colleagues, with the intent of helping them achieve individual development

goals. Consequently, a CLS is most effective when managers want to help their employees build lasting personal strengths. In contrast, Benincasa (2012) argues that a CLS has almost no effect when employees are not open to feedback or are not willing to learn.

According to Hall et al. (1999), leaders who receive coaching are more likely to be goal and relationship oriented and provide more guidance than managers who do not receive coaching. Moreover, they have more interest in learning, improved self-awareness and a higher degree of personal development. These traits can result in more effective management (Kampa and White, 2002).

Ellinger et al. (2003) also find a correlation between managers' coaching behaviours and job satisfaction and job performance. They discover improved knowledge sharing among employees when managers make use of coaching (Ellinger et al., 2003). This observation is reinforced by Park et al. (2008), who find a correlation of CLS with organizational learning, employee personal learning and turnover intention. Henson (2013) further demonstrates that a CLS builds confidence, promotes individual competence and contributes to developing a strong commitment to common goals. Furthermore, leaders develop and improve their own leadership effectiveness. For example, managers use self-coaching to find solutions to their own problems. The result is more confidence and more self-control among managers who practice CLS. Another effect is that these leaders seem to cope better with stress (Henson, 2013).

Although managers may have a clear intention to use coaching, it is easy to fail. A key reason is that managers spend too little time with their employees (Cox et al. 2010). Another common cause is a lack of communication and information about the goal and purpose—for example, about the expected effects of coaching. Moreover, managers often lack the time and skills needed to make full use of a CLS (Goleman, 1998). To succeed with a CLS, the managers must have a "coaching mind-set" and have faith that they can fulfil the coaching leader role. They must also have specific skills and abilities to carry it out (Ellinger and Bostrom, 2002; Hunt and Weintraub, 2002).

According to Ellinger and Bostrom (2002), leaders who succeed with a CLS have empathy for and trust in others, less need for control and directing, a desire to help others develop, openness to feedback and personalized learning and a belief that most people want to learn. They also have confidence that this outcomes can be achieved through incremental learning, not through a "sink or swim" strategy. These thoughts and attitudes form the basis of a coaching mind-set (Hunt and Weintraub, 2002). There is a clear distinction between a CLS and management: CLS involves helping employees grow and develop; management is about telling people what to do (Ellinger and Bostrom, 2002). Management therefore implies deciding, telling, coordinating and control, whereas CLS involves listening, helping, supporting, developing, removing obstacles and empowerment. Because situations differ and require varied leadership styles, Hunt and Weintraub (2002) argue that managers should switch between CLS and management.

Cox et al. (2010) find that leaders who succeed believe they have the skills and experience necessary to coach their employees. They perceive self-efficacy and the right skills to establish trust and build good relations with their employees. Most important, these leaders really care about their employees and truly want to help them succeed. They emphasize learning as a key element of coaching. Learning is most effective when it is integrated as part of the work; employees receive feedback and are encouraged to learn by themselves (Hicks, 2014). However, Cox et al. (2010) caution that employees must have the necessary capability to learn, be willing to learn, receive relevant information and understand why they need to learn.

3. Research methodology

In this study, we seek to understand project managers' experiences of and opinions about CLS. We used qualitative methodologies and a case study approach. Qualitative research is often used to identify alternative or new views on a particular topic or set of research questions; thus, it often includes methodologies designed to obtain opinions and interpretations rather than objective, measurable data (Patton, 2002). Case studies using qualitative data are especially appropriate for exploratory research when the goal is an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in its context (Yin, 2009). The two basic types of sampling are probability and nonprobability. Since generalization in a statistical sense is not a goal of qualitative research, the most appropriate sampling strategy is nonprobabilistic – also called purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Patton, 2002). This sampling process is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select the case from which the most can be learned. In the current research, we study a financial service group (FSG) in Scandinavia. We chose this organization because of its expected capacity to provide data and relevant information. The main selection criteria were that this organization is project oriented (work is organized in projects) and that their project managers practice coaching and a coaching leadership style.

We used in-depth interviews, following a semistructured approach, which is preferred when an interview's purpose is to obtain data representing the informant's point of view. Seidman (1991) argues that collecting personal experiences, opinions and meanings from those intimately involved is the best way of getting near the truth. The research team created an interview guide used to organize the interview sessions. Examples of interview questions were 'How do you practice coaching in your role as project manager?' 'What characterizes a CLS?' 'What are the challenges and dilemmas using coaching?' and 'What are the experiences and results of coaching?' Most were open-ended—in other words, structured to require rich, context-heavy responses. As a result, the team often asked follow-up questions and clarified responses.

We obtained empirical data from 12 project managers, selected on the basis of an evaluation performed by the senior project leader and the researchers. The evaluation focused on the participants' experience with and use of a CLS. We conducted interviews at the respondents' workplace, and they lasted approximately two hours. The same researchers conducted all the interviews to ensure consistency. The interviews were conducted face-to-face; when necessary, we scheduled follow-up telephone interviews to discuss unclear data.

For this research, we used a qualitative form of content analysis to analyse how project managers practice a coaching leadership style (Patton, 2002). Qualitative content analysis can be used for description of the manifest content (i.e. surface and visible content in an interview text), as well as interpretations of the latent content (i.e. underlying meaning in an interview text) with varying depth and abstraction as a result. The combination of both manifest and latent content analysis leads to more insightful findings (Boström et al., 2010). The analysis was carried out in several steps. First, the transcribed interviews were read and checked regarding accuracy by the main researcher. Then we read all the interviews for an overall assessment. In the subsequent data reduction, the interviews were processed separately by both researchers who performed manifest as well as latent content analysis. We sought for words, statements, differences, nuances, patterns and similarities in the responses. For example we quote answers herein that we perceived as particularly clarifying; these quotes represent the participants' views, support and highlight the findings and enrich our discussion.

4. Empirical results and analysis

The organization we studied was a financial service group (FSG) in Scandinavia. Within this organization, we studied how they practiced CLS within the Information Systems Development department. This project oriented department consisted of approximately 120 project managers. Most of the systems development projects were either digitalization projects or compliance projects. They work agile using scrum as the preferred project management framework. The project managers' responsibility included activities such as planning, organizing, coordinating, and reporting to the steering group. In each steering group, four to five departments were represented by their functional manager. The functional managers responsibility were to secure the project with enough resources, make technical clarifications and get the organization ready to implement the new system.

4.1 Challenges

Interviews with project managers in the studied FSG revealed that the biggest challenge they experience as leaders was achieving results through team members. As one interviewee stated,
> *The biggest challenge we face always has something to do with people.*

This challenge can be separated into three major categories: project managers must deal with people who may be very different, traditions and cultures develop over a long period of time and time pressures exist.

Challenge 1: Employees are very different

Our interviewees noted that their employees have very different behaviours, attitudes and thinking. One way to conceptualize these differences is to apply a locus of control perspective (Rotter 1990), which involves two control locations. People with an external locus of control believe the environment controls their behaviour—for example, that they have a difficult boss or demanding clients or are working under severe time pressure. These people find it difficult to make changes in their situation and remain passive. With an internal locus of control (Rotter, 1990), people believe they control their own behaviour. These people believe they have the opportunity to make choices and changes, even if the situation is difficult and demanding.

Another conceptualization distinguishes two forms of thinking: a learning-oriented mind-set is present when a person is keen to learn and develop, and a fixed mind-set exists when the person is not concerned with his or her own learning and development but rather is primarily focused on achievement (Dweck, 2006). A person with a fixed mind-set is primarily concerned with how others perceive him, whereas a person with a learning-oriented mind-set is focused on how she can improve.

A third conceptualization highlights several distorted ways of thinking, also called thinking traps (Burns, 1980). For example, extreme or all-or-nothing thinking implies that unless everything is absolutely perfect, the person experiences it as a failure. Overgeneralization means that actions that fail are interpreted as a rule that the person will always fail. The personalizing thinking trap is when the person erroneously blames him- or herself for negative events or results. Enlargement and reduction involve overstating the importance of negative factors and underestimating the importance of positive factors in a given situation.

Challenge 2: Development of a common culture

The FSG's organizational structure spans Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. The cultures of these countries differ; for example, in Norway, the organization is less hierarchical than in

the other countries. The relations between departments such as finance, marketing and information technology are also different. Interviewees remarked that how people interpret a project—how to proceed, work, lead and support one another—varies. For each project, rules are created internally, but these rules differ in, for example, Sweden compared with Denmark and Norway. Our interviewees also revealed a culture characterized by employees who both give and take. However, interviewees consistently underscored that top management wants to develop a common culture in which employees are skilled at cooperating and helping one another but also perform and achieve results.

The implications of the 'give' culture as found in FSG are several. Team members spend a great deal of time coaching, mentoring and teaching one another. In such a culture, members share knowledge and offer advice without expecting anything in return. Expertise is transferred from those who can to those who cannot. Employees view their jobs as a vocation and value intrinsic rewards. They appreciate freedom and self-management, learning, self-efficacy and working for something greater than themselves.

In contrast, the 'take' culture that we observed among some employees in FSG creates rivalry, competition and a tougher working environment. Here the employees try to get as much as possible from others without giving anything in return. Colleagues help one another sometimes, but only when the personal benefits outweigh the burdens. The employees take credit for others' success and prefer to talk about I and me instead of we and us. They are mostly concerned about their own career, power and material needs.

Challenge 3: Time pressure in projects
Another common major challenge to the FSG's projects is time pressure, especially as the deadline approaches. Interviewees pointed to poor planning, lack of resources, overoptimistic estimation and changes in requirements and scope as reasons. They noted that for some project managers, such time pressure may affect their leadership: the tougher the time pressure, the more likely they are to implement a more directing leadership style.

4.2 How coaching is practiced
When practicing coaching, the FSG's activities are oriented toward a focal point: results orientation with customer satisfaction. The firm set two goals for 2015: compliance and simplification. Analysis of collected data indicates that the firm is basically using the GROW model as a coaching method (Skiffington and Zeus, 2003; Whitmore, 2010) but is more concerned with the outcome of coaching than the model itself. The GROW model is a change process, a method for goal setting and problem solving which consists of four phases – Goal, Reality, Option and Way forward. The goal is where the client wants to be. The reality is where the client is now. The option is what is possible and the way forward is the action steps which will take the client to their goal. Interviewees mentioned that they are taught to ask questions (e.g., 'What is your goal?' 'Where do you stand today?' 'What options do you have?' 'What prevents you?' 'How can you overcome obstacles?' 'What do you choose to do?') However, they did not believe that coaching is the answer to everything; they noted that it is important to have a large toolbox, so the project manager has an extensive action repertoire.

Different forms of coaching
The firm's project managers practice different forms of coaching. First, they use coaching as a tool when working together with employees to achieve results. The purpose is to solve daily problems. Second, they use coaching to develop confidence and solid self-efficacy. A third

form of coaching focuses on the development of good relationships and constructive collaboration, which supports the growth of a give culture. For example, one of the project managers we interviewed stated:

> *I use coaching to build a climate where it is permissible to make mistakes. One does not need to be 'picture perfect' immediately.*

The interviews also revealed a fourth form of coaching: a reciprocal coaching arrangement, in which managers help, support and challenge one another (Berg and Karlsen, 2007). The project managers noted that coaching works best when it occurs as a natural part of the job. Some of the interviewees explained that that when they implemented a formal coaching process, it felt somewhat artificial and compulsory. 'Learning becomes more difficult', one claimed. Another believed that coaching should take place 'on the floor' when talking about specific activities and challenges. In some situations, they noted it could be useful to take an hour and have a more informal coaching session.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, as conceptualized by Bandura (1997), is 'an individual's confidence about his abilities two mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources and courses of action needed two successfully execute a specific task within at a given context' (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998, p. 1). Our analysis of data indicates that the FGS project managers feel strong self-efficacy in terms of coaching. This is an interesting finding, considering that people with high self-efficacy succeed better with their tasks than those with low self-efficacy (Malone, 2001).

Coaching can affect self-efficacy (Moen and Skaalvik, 2009). Interviewees noted that women use coaching more often than men, surmising that women are often more willing to listen to and spend time with their employees, whereas men are more problem-focused and often make quick decisions. As one interviewee stated, 'Our experience in FGS is that women want to help each other. Men are different; they prefer to consider each other, not primarily help each other'.

4.3 Results from coaching

Collected data showed that the FGS had not undertaken any systematic evaluation of coaching training that the project managers received. However, several project managers were positively surprised with the results of coaching, which has led to a positive attitude toward this leadership style.

Comments imply that coaching has primarily contributed to personal development. The project managers believed they had become better leaders, citing increased employee involvement, better active listening and higher employee confidence levels as examples of improved practice. These findings support those of Finn et al. (2007), who note coaching's positive effect on managers' own confidence and the self-efficacy of both transactional and transformational leadership, and Moen and Skaalvik (2009), who find that coaching causes a significant change in self-efficacy, goals, intrapersonal causal attribution and need satisfaction.

Data also reveal that coaching has improved individual project managers' self-awareness and self-understanding. It has also led to a better understanding of how team members think, feel and act. For example,

> *Coaching helped me to realize that a manager does not need to be the best at everything.*

> *Employees may have several unique competencies that can be used in the organization.*

Through coaching I have become more aware of a number of things, such as the importance of listening to others and not just make my own decisions.

Not everything has to go through the project manager. Employees can find the answers themselves by helping each other. They can use a form of colleague coaching.

According to Goleman (1998, 2004), such emotional intelligence represents a key tool in coaching, focusing on self-awareness, empathy, self-management and relationship management. Coaching involves explicit trust in employees. When this is the case, it is possible to experience the evolution of a mutual influence process. However, the assumption is that employees feel that they have the necessary responsibility, autonomy and competence. Deci and Ryan (2008, p. 183) note this aspect is 'essential for optimal functioning in a broad range of highly varied cultures'.

Data show that the project managers also had become more proficient in their own self-management. For example,

Coaching helped me to control my own temperament as a leader.

Coaching helped me to become more aware of my own situation, to take control of my own life, but also to teach my employees to lead themselves.

Manz and Sims (2001) note that this effect of coaching is common. Both managers and employees need more structure in how they use their time, including how they think, feel and act. Another project manager expressed it this way:

Coaching helped me to become tougher. Now I am more conscious of which invitations to accept. It is easier to be tough, if I know that I am so kind that others can exploit me. Then you can also lose respect.

It is easy to succumb to temptations and postpone tasks. For example, an interviewee claimed that coaching has helped to 'get myself and others on the right track'. They all have become more skilled at 'arresting time thieves'.

From a relational perspective, leadership is understood as 'embedded in the everyday relationally responsive dialogical practices of leaders' (Cunliffe and Ericksen, 2011, p. 1426). Dialogue and interaction contributes to creating organizational practices. In line with these findings, two interviewees noted,

Building relationships is important, and I use dialogue and meetings on this so the client doesn't perceive me as a strict project manager.

A CLS is a form of relationship management, which can work especially well when the project manager faces challenges and problems. For example, in meetings, practicing a CLS helps the project manager become aware of the importance of involving and engaging employees.

5. Discussion and contribution

5.1 Coaching leadership toolbox

The project managers identified four tools at which they were skilled within the framework of a CLS, which sometimes overlap: colleague coaching (Berg and Karlsen, 2012), leadership agility (Joiner and Josephs, 2007), empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995) and feedback. However, the interviews revealed that project managers' expertise in the implementation of these tools varied significantly. This finding substantiates the notion that project managers, as well as other team

members, are different and must be treated as individuals (Sosik and Jung, 2010). Consequently, any tools implemented must take into account these differences, which requires a flexible leadership style and a large toolbox.

Other tools include partnerships in learning (Ellinger and Bostrom, 1999), resilience (Berg and Karlsen, 2014), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), locus of control (Rotter, 1990), emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2004), signature strengths (Peterson and Seligman, 2004), a give culture (Grant, 2013), self-coaching (Lucinani, 2004), psychological capital (Berg and Karlsen, 2014), positive feelings (Johnson and Fredrickson, 2005), the ABCDE model (Burns, 1980) and mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). In the following subsections, we discuss some of the most relevant and important tools. Then we create a model for CLS based on those tools.

5.2 The individual complexity
One of the biggest challenges project managers face is leading employees who are very different. They cannot use the same leadership style with different employees. The situational leadership model II accommodates this flexibility (Blanchard, 2007) with its four leadership styles—directing, coaching, supporting and delegating. The optimal leadership style is based on the employee's degree of competence and commitment. However, researchers question whether the individual is perhaps more complex and multifaceted than the division into competence and commitment entails (e.g., Burns, 1980; Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Dweck, 2006; Kahneman, 2012; Rotter 1990).

We observed many of these individual differences in our study. However, few leadership theories focus on this type of challenge to the extent that the CLS does. Use of emotional intelligence (Goleman 1998; and Bar-On, 2000) can help managers understand individuals and develop a CLS.

5.3 Emotional intelligence
The project managers noted that when they practiced a CLS, it resulted in both personal development and better functioning in their leadership role. The personal development aspect implies that when one is better acquainted with oneself, he or she becomes more proficient in self-management. In addition, project managers developed greater empathy and better relationships with their employees, and mutual confidence increased. These results suggest that it is appropriate for managers to use emotional intelligence as part of their toolbox.

	I	*We (you and I)*
Thoughts and emotions	**1. Self-awareness** • Self-talk • Self-emotions	**2. Empathy** • Cognitive empathy • Emotional empathy
Behaviour	**3. Self-management** • Courage • Self-discipline	**4. Relationship management** • Trust • Give culture

Figure 1: Emotional intelligence (adapted from Bar-On, 2000; Goleman, 1998)

The emotional intelligence framework for understanding oneself and others in Figure 1 contains four skills in two dimensions (Bar-On, 2000; Goleman, 1998). One dimension includes 'I' and 'we'. The other dimension differentiates between thoughts/feelings and behaviour. The four key skills in emotional intelligence, understood as a 2×2 matrix, are self-awareness, empathy, self-management and relationship management, each of which can be further nuanced (e.g., self-management is about self-discipline and courage).

5.4 Partnership in learning

No doubt, it is useful to have knowledge such as emotional intelligence. However, managers might experience a knowing–doing gap (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000): Even if the manager has a solution, it may be difficult to implement it. Coaching is a partnership in learning in which the coach and coachee help each other find solutions and implement them (Ellinger and Bostrom, 1999), which also applies to a CLS. Through dialogue and active listening, challenging questions, inspiration and good timing, the solutions are found. However, the manager's goal is to enable employees to find the answers themselves, thereby providing self-efficacy and motivation (Baron and Morin, 2009).

The CLS differs from the most dominant theories about leadership, (e.g., Blanchard's [2007] situational leadership model I) in its idea of a partnership in learning. Manager and employee are encouraged to develop good relationships characterized by trust and challenge each other to find solutions. This process may involve reinterpreting situations, reformulating goals, trying out tools and constantly learning from the process. To some extent, the full range leadership model (Bass and Avolio, 1994; Sosik and Jung, 2010) covers such learning processes. However, the model does not emphasize the employee's strengths, creativity and values, compared with CLS.

Several studies show that learning from experience separates successful leaders from managers who do not succeed (Charan et al., 2001). According to Steward et al. (2011), this requires that the individual have personal qualities such as self-efficacy and self-awareness. To succeed with a partnership in learning and a CLS, the interviewed project managers and employees must have self-awareness and know their strengths. The most important tool for developing skilled employees is to identify and develop human character, or so-called signature strengths (Seligman, 2002).

5.5 Signature strengths

Although project managers may have a clear intention to use a CLS, they may be tempted to become a mentor or use a more directive leadership style if they feel time pressures and the need to get the job done. In addition, project managers may not have the self-discipline and patience required to coach effectively.

A way to make more use of a CLS is to become familiar with one's own signature strengths (Peterson and Seligman, 2004), that is, features that constitute basic qualities in the individual (e.g., discipline, courage, creativity, emotional intelligence, altruism). Positive psychology assumes that if people use their signature strengths in important parts of life, they will develop joy and meaning (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Linley et al. (2010) note that the identification of unrealized signature strengths offers huge potential for growth and development.

Strength-based coaching builds confidence and positive emotions (Toogood, 2012). A CLS should also be strength-based and emphasize identification of each employee's expertise. Being

more familiar with oneself and one's own signature strengths is part of an individual's self-management.

5.6 Self-management

The project managers emphasized empowerment through the practice of a CLS. The goal is for employees to feel they have the knowledge to influence their work (Spreitzer, 1995), which corresponds with the idea of a CLS that assumes employees should be guided to lead themselves (Sims and Manz, 1996). This is a broader view on self-management compared with how self-management was used in section 5.3 and involves four inner tasks: develop positive thoughts, positive feelings, positive behaviour and positive results. It can provide profound meaning, as well as motivation and energy, to the project manager's job.
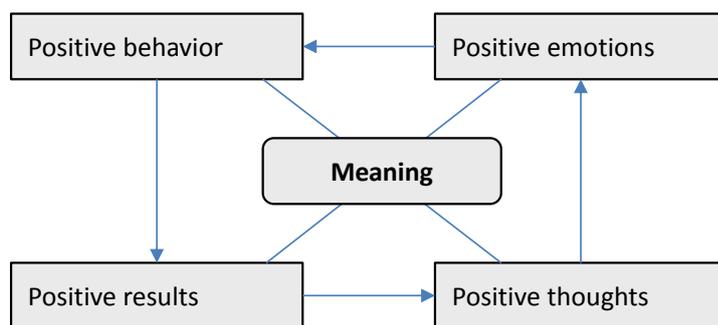
Figure 2: Four inner tasks in CLS

Positive thoughts can involve goals to be achieved, projects to be implemented, own strengths and success stories. Positive emotions pertain to commitment, passion, joy, optimism and self-efficacy. Positive behaviour encompasses delegating tasks, resolving conflicts, giving praise, listening actively and asking powerful questions. The more effective employees are in self-management, the greater the likelihood that they will reach their goals and experience meaning. Successfully developing employees who can lead themselves requires leaders who have mastered their own self-management, or 'super management' (Sims and Manz, 1996). Self-management is closely linked to self-coaching (Luciani, 2004).

5.7 A 'give' culture

The top management at the studied firm wants to develop a common corporate culture. However, it is unclear how this culture should be described, beyond that it should help achieve business objectives.

In a give culture, members help one another, share knowledge and use colleague coaching without expecting anything in return Grant (2013). There is a clear correlation between a give culture and productivity, efficiency, profits and employee satisfaction (Berg and Karlsen, 2012). Although employees also help one another in a take culture, that occurs only when the personal benefit exceeds any disadvantages of giving. Our findings indicate that CLS can amplify a give culture.

5.8 A CLS model

Coaching is a partnership in learning to help people succeed (Ellinger and Bostrom, 1999; Whitmore, 2010). In the FSG, they practice coaching using the GROW model, which focuses on defining goals, understanding the individual's situation, and making decisions (Skiffington and Zeus, 2003). Similarly, CLS can build these divisions in different learning stages (not listed in order of priority): (1) What is the goal? (2) What is the situation today? (3) What are the barriers? and (4) How can I realize the goals?
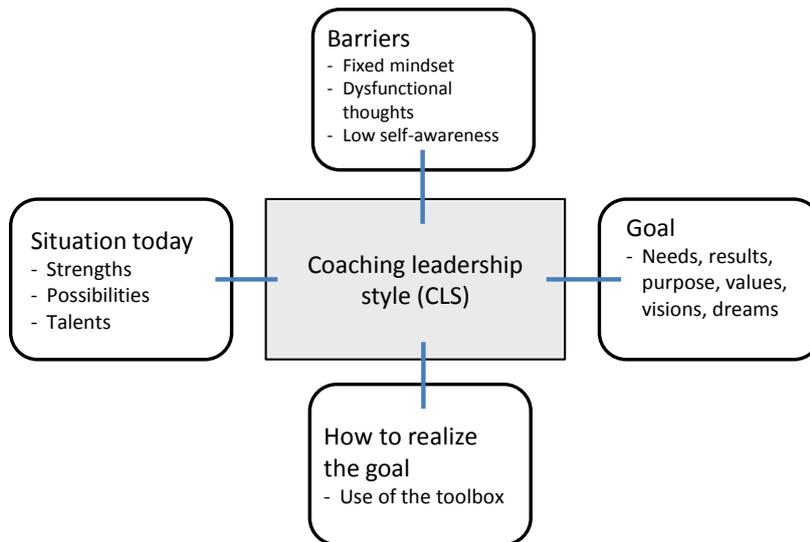
Figure 3: Four external tasks in CLS

We describe these questions as four external tasks in CLS. Faced with these challenges, it may be useful to gain an understanding of how employees interpret their situation; in other situations, it may be useful to clarify the wishes; in still other situations, it may be informative to start by clarifying the gap between the current and the desired situation.

What is the goal?
Coaching involves helping the individual achieve both work performance goals and personal development goals, thereby increasing the efficiency of projects and organizations (Kilburg, 2000). To measure progress toward goals, Kaplan and Norton's (1996) measurement criteria, such as employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction and internal efficiency (e.g., cost effectiveness, learning efficiency) are useful. Employees accomplish more when they have specific goals to work toward (Locke, 1996). Locke (1996) also identifies several correlations showing the significance of goals: Clear and demanding goals lead to better implementation. The more demanding the target, the greater joy one feels. Goals are most effective when employees receive feedback about progress. Employees who are convinced that the goal is important and achievable attain the highest commitment to the goal. Hersey and Blanchard (1996) argue that the goals should be specific, motivational, ambitious, relevant and realistic and timed and simple (SMART). In this context, CLS emphasizes the importance of clarifying goals and level of ambitions and facilitates clear goals (Grant et. al., 2009).

What is the situation today?
When working with change issues, it is important to distinguish a deficit approach and an abundance approach (Cameron and Lavine, 2006). The deficit approach focuses on weaknesses, faults and shortcomings in individuals, teams and organizations. The purpose is to identify problems, analyze them, find alternatives, choose a solution and implement this option. However, the focus on errors and omissions may provide negative emotions. This strategy can put employees in a defensive position.

The abundance approach begins with identifying the peak experiences, when an individual, a team or the organization has performed optimally, and understand what makes it possible to achieve such results. This strategy also emphasizes finding ways that these good results can be continued and repeated in the future, as well as how to implement strategies to create a desired future marked by good results. The focus is on success and the development of positive emotions. There is a correlation between positive emotions and creativity, achievement and well-being. Mastery, self-esteem, optimism and gratitude increase (Linley et al., 2010). One must understand the current situation to identify what works well. To this end, CLS emphasizes the identification of strengths and understanding where individuals, teams and organizations are in their development. Use of strength-based coaching can lead to better goal achievement, improved self-confidence and positive emotions (Toogood, 2012).

What are the barriers?
Organizations face internal barriers. An example of internal barriers is a fixed mind-set rather than a learning-oriented mind-set (Dweck, 2006). Employees with a fixed mind-set may not be able to distinguish System 1 thinking and System 2 thinking in situations in which one or the other is preferable (Kahneman, 2012). A fixed mind-set can also lead to dysfunctional thought patterns (Burns, 1980). Thoughts may influence feelings (Ellis, 1994; Ellis and Dryden, 1987): Dysfunctional thoughts can lead to negative emotions, whereas positive thoughts contribute to good feelings such as optimism, hope, joy and self-efficacy. There is a correlation of positive emotions with creativity, collaboration and efficiency (Fredrickson, 2001). A CLS emphasizes understanding these opposing forces, to be able to master them. Coaching can contribute to more self-awareness and greater understanding of the challenges that managers and employees face (Grant et al., 2009; Newsom and Dent, 2011).

How can I realize goals?
What distinguishes CLS from other leadership theories is that CLS considers each individual unique. It is often difficult to find clear answers about what should be done in specific situations. However, leadership is a partnership in learning. The learning process consists of two parts, an internal process (Process 1) and an external process (Process 2). Process 1 involves good self-management or self-coaching—for example, people trying to develop positive, realistic thoughts, feelings and behaviours, which can provide positive results. Process 2 involves clarifying the current situation, defining goals, recognizing barriers and using the toolbox to achieve the goals. Process 1 focuses primarily on the individual, whereas Process 2 focuses on the individual's interaction with the context.

This model has several common features with the GROW model observed in FSG. Both methods emphasize to set up clear goals, understand the current reality and implement actions to achieve goals. However, very often change processes fail due to obstacles and barriers that the managers are not aware of. In the presented model, emphasis is therefore placed on identifying any barriers to change followed by actions to overcome these barriers. Often the

barriers are the employees themselves. Therefore, it is important to understand the thoughts, feelings and behaviors and then try to influence this (see Figure 4).
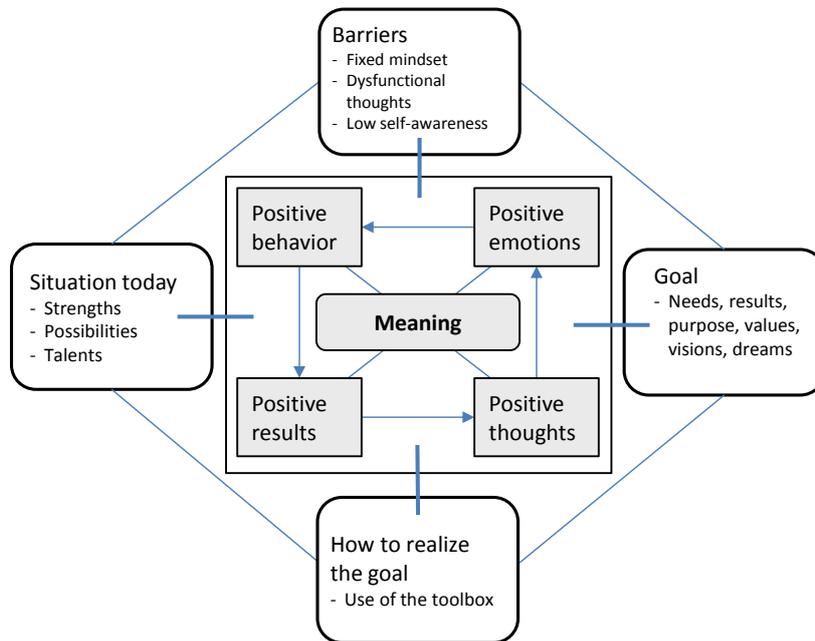
Figure 4: Two learning processes in CLS

A CLS can contribute to development of both Process 1 and Process 2. This leadership style is most effective when the manager wants to help team members build personal strengths that will make the employee more successful in the long run (Benincasa, 2012). Styhre (2008) believes that coaching can help solve everyday problems. Our interviews lend support to this finding.

In contrast, a CLS is least effective when the members of a team are not open to feedback or are not willing to learn (Benincasa, 2012). We do not suggest, however, that this situation is hopeless; through a CLS, even employees initially not open to feedback can change their thoughts and behaviours. Several studies highlight that coaching can help develop self-awareness, self-efficacy, trust and a good relationship between coach and coachee, and positive changes can result (Grant et al., 2009; Toogood, 2012).

Several of the project managers in the FSG have the advantage of leadership agility (i.e., an interaction between two competencies; Joiner and Joseph, 2007). For example, adopting an external locus of control, project managers can identify external challenges and be aware of the skills required to meet these challenges effectively. They can switch to an internal locus of control to focus on the mental and emotional competencies required for effective management. There is a strong correlation between leaders becoming more agile and their effectiveness (Joiner and Joseph, 2007). In this study, we emphasize the consideration of the 'competencies' as learning processes and the use of a large toolbox, which include signature strengths, self-management and a give culture.

6. Conclusion and future research
This paper contributes to the theory and practice of coaching by describing how project managers practice a coaching leadership style (CLS) and how this leadership style can be

further developed by learning and implementation of CLS tools and techniques. In this research we have interviewed key project managers in FSG who highlight three key challenges they face: (a) Employees are very different and therefore difficult to lead; (b) Cultural differences, i.e. some share knowledge and other do not; and (c) Time pressure in projects. Project managers in FSG makes partial use of a coaching leadership style. However, to be better able to tackle the challenges they face, there is a desire to learn how a coaching leadership style could be further developed and focus on two learning processes. The first process (Process 1) implies that project managers train their employees to lead themselves. The effect is a form of recognition where each employee gets a greater understanding of his thoughts, feelings and behavior, and possible results. The second process (Process 2) means that employees work together, including a leader, to build a common culture. This may include the development of a give – culture. Phases in such a process is to understand the strengths of an organization, clarify goals, identify barriers and make use of the toolbox to achieve the goals.

At the end, we will present some suggestions for future research. Since researchers differ on what a CLS is (Blanchard, 2007; Hicks, 2014), future research should continue to focus on the conceptualization and development of mental models of CLS. Scholars could also work further with case descriptions and representative studies to gain more understanding of the positive and negative impacts of using a CLS.

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