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An evaluation of management training and coaching

Morten Emil Berg and Jan Terje Karlsen

BI Norwegian Business School

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An evaluation of management training and coaching

Abstract

PURPOSE: The focus of this paper is on management training and development. The purpose has been to address how coaching can be applied to learn about leadership tools and what effect this has on management behaviour and development.

METHODOLOGY: This is a qualitative case study of a management development program. The empirical data were obtained using in-depth interviews, surveys, and observations. In addition to investigating the 14 participants, data were also collected from their superiors and subordinates.

FINDINGS: One of the main findings is that coaching is a helpful training process to learn about the manager's toolbox and to develop new management behavior. Furthermore, data revealed that the management training should be based on the specific work challenges that the participants experience at their workplace. Based on a variety of work challenges, the participants highlighted the following tools as most important: Emotional intelligence, empowerment, self-management, signature-strengths, and positive emotions.

LIMITATIONS: Future research should apply a more comprehensive research design, for example, using a control group.

IMPLICATIONS: Data analysis shows that coaching is a management training process where the participants can learn to solve real work challenges. By trial and testing at their own workplace, managers learn how to use appropriate tools and change their behaviour. As part of the learning process we recommend debriefing where the managers can get feedback and inspiration for self-reflection. Furthermore, through team and peer coaching, the managers can help each other learn. We also recommend that the participant's superiors and subordinates should be involved in the training process.

ORIGINALITY: In this research we have studied coaching as a learning and training method applying leadership tools.

Keywords: Management training and development, Coaching, Leadership tools, Evaluation.

Category: Research paper

An evaluation of management training and coaching

Introduction

A challenge in many organizations is identifying and developing the leadership talent needed for growth and expansion (Avolio, 2011; Fegley, 2006). Organizations and individuals have, however, a strong immunity to change (Kegan and Lahey, 2009). Conventional management development does not always deliver the expected outcomes. There may be several reasons for poor outcomes: The management training program may be based on simple theories and models, whilst the leadership function is ample with complexity (Barker, 1997). There may exist a knowing-doing gap which is demanding to overcome (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000). Furthermore, the individual's self-efficacy with regard to his or her own capacity to change may be too little, at the same time the temptation to continue as usual (old behavioural patterns) is too big (Prochaska, 2000).

In this article we study coaching as a methodology for management development (Hackman and Wageman, 2005). Coaching is a training process that can develop self-confidence, self-efficacy, and contribute to actions that create results. Coaching is about helping other people to succeed. The core of coaching is learning and change (Cox et al., 2010). We will argue that coaching can help managers through dialogue and behaviour change to increase their action repertoires and become more action focused. As in sports, where a coach enables an athlete to transform physical and psychological strengths into performance prowess, one can coach a manager to empower self-regulation (Green and Grant, 2003), and self-leadership (Manz and Sims, 2001). There are many approaches to coaching. Our study draws especially on a combination of a cognitive behavioural approach to coaching (Neenan and Palmer, 2001) and a solution-focused approach to coaching (Greene and Grant, 2003). This means that the coachee is challenged and supported to acknowledge their own thoughts and behaviour, to change this in order to reach specific goals. In this article we have studied coaching as a methodology for training 14 middle-managers and project managers to enhance their management skills in order to function better in their respective managerial roles. The aim of the training program was to develop the participants' toolbox and change their behaviour to improve the use of various tools. Throughout the program, the participants were presented with a variety of tools and each one had to decide which tools they wanted to improve on. The outcome or effect of the learning process is evaluated according to Kirkpatrick's (1998) four levels of evaluation: Reaction; Learning; Behaviour; and Result. Hence, the purpose of this article is to address how coaching can be applied, including both team and peer coaching contexts, and what effect this has on leadership behaviour and development. More specifically, this article focuses on the manager's capability to learn and apply leadership tools. We believe this research will contribute to minimize the current gap in the body of knowledge about coaching as a methodology for management training and workplace learning.

Coaching

Coaching has in some firms become a natural process of management training and development. Even though it has received a great deal of attention, there are so many different views of coaching that it tends to confuse more than it clarifies. We acknowledge that there are several definitions of coaching, for example Cox et al. (2010), Greene and Grant (2003), Kampa-Kokesch (2002), and Zeus and Skiffington (2000). However, we generally agree with Downey's (2003) definition: "Coaching is the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another". It is about helping other people succeed as Whitmore (2009) defines: "Coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them". Like Berg and Karlsen (2007) we argue that coaching can be defined as the process of challenging and supporting a person or a team to develop ways of thinking, ways of being, and ways of learning. The purpose is to achieve personal and/or organizational goals. These definitions underline that coaching is a learning approach where the coach assists the manager in developing his/her talents. The techniques and methods used are mostly questions, encouraging and challenging the person to do something, and giving feedback.

Clearly, executives and managers today are caught up in times of unprecedented organizational change and complexity. Whether their focus is on bottom-line results, cost reductions, globalization, IT or environmental issues, the pressures are immense. Since the late 1990s the use of coaching in organizations has become mainstream, often as an alternative to traditional executive training (Feldman and Lankau, 2005). Coaching represents motivational training and is aimed at helping executives and managers enhance their effectiveness in the workplace (Feldman and Lankau, 2005). Several research studies show that in a coaching relationship the managers will create new insight, develop new knowledge and skills, and spur personal growth (Hall et al., 1999). It is about gaining new insight into the key capabilities necessary to achieve desired results. The process integrates practical behavioural change over time at the workplace (Grant et al., 2009).

Coaching can take place in two different forms. A coach may choose to work one-to-one with an individual manager, or conduct workshops and seminars with larger groups of managers. The latter approach is a one-to-many coaching process, also defined as team coaching (Clutterbuck, 2010).

Team coaching in the workplace is a relatively new concept, although it is well established within the world of sports. It is an approach which is based on the principles of andragogy (Knowles, 1978), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990). According to Clutterbuck (2010), Hackman and Wageman (2005) made the first significant attempt to define team coaching. They described it as a direct intervention with a team intended to help members make coordinated and task appropriate use of their collective resources in accomplishing the team's work. Clutterbuck (2010) argues that this theoretical approach has a short-term performance orientation. In contrast, Clutterbuck (2010, p. 271) has developed a definition which focuses on the team as a learning organization: "a learning intervention designed to increase collective capability and performance of a group or team, through application of the coaching principles of assisted reflection, analysis and motivation for change". There are also other definitions of team coaching, for example Zeus and Skiffington (2000) who present the team coach as someone who facilitates problem solving and conflict management, monitors team performance and coordinates the team and the more senior management sponsor. According to Clutterbuck (2010), this interpretation

emphasizes a very hands-on role for the team coach and a high level of responsibility for team performance.

The coaching process is often managed by a professional coach. However, today we also experience extensive peer coaching where each participant acts as both the coach and the coachee. Peer coaching was originally developed as a process for educators and teachers to consult with one another, to discuss and share teaching practices, to observe one another's classrooms, to promote collegiality and support, and to help ensure quality teaching for all students (Ackland, 1991). Apparently, peer coaching tends to be more focused on goals than peer-learning (Parker et al. 2008). Holbeche defines peer coaching as a "developmental relationship with the clear purpose of supporting individuals within it to achieve their job objectives" (Holbeche, 1996, p. 26). According to Ladyshevsky (2010) peer coaching is a management development process involving a coach and a coachee, with relatively equal status, focusing on expanding, refining and building new skills, leadership tools and knowledge in training and workplace situations. Peer coaching is a cost-effective approach in which individuals seek support from those they see as equals to resolve daily issues and integrate new forms of behaviour. The purpose is to enhance the professional practice at the workplace.

To maintain the equality in status is central to the success of peer coaching. It is essential that the communication is non-evaluative and that the feedback is non-threatening (Showers, 1984). Where communication and feedback are threatening, this can destroy the trust between coach and coachee. Distrust can also evolve if the actors for example are competing for the same position in the organization. A good relationship is based on trust, confidentiality and reciprocity. In a training process the roles of the coach and the coachee should be turned around repeatedly in order to get the most out of the talks and create a win-win situation. Peer coaching can in particular be helpful if one of the participants have more experience in a specific area than the other.

Sue-Chan and Latham (2004) compared external coaches with peer coaches with, which by definition include both internal and external coaching. The results were, among others:

- Participants believed that external coaches had more credibility than peer coaches
- Individuals with an external coach were more satisfied with the coaching process, compared with individuals who had peer coaches
- Coaching from an external coach resulted in higher performance than coaching from a peer

According to Sue-Chan and Latham (2004), implications from this study are that it not sufficient to only make use of peer coaching to achieve expected results. This is why some training programs include team coaching as a complementary method, such as the one we are studying. However, Cox et al. (2010) argue that peer coaching can be an important element of team learning and organizational learning at the workplace.

Leadership tools

There is an ongoing controversy about what is the difference between management and leadership (Yukl, 2010). Bennis and Nanus (1985) suggests that managers are people who do things right, while leaders are people who do the right things. Kotter (1990) argues that management seeks to produce predictability and order, while leadership seek to produce organizational change. Leaders are working closely with co-workers, for example listen to

and involve them. Leaders care about both their employees and the financial results. Managers are more impersonal and place greater emphasis on efficiency, for example by focusing on goals, procedures and systems without involving employees. However, in this article we do not find it necessary to make any clear distinction between the terms.

A number of studies about coaching have focused on leadership tools, but from different perspectives such as meeting effectiveness (Perkins, 2009), empathy and psychological contracts (O’Broin and Palmer, 2009), goal-setting (Scoular and Linley, 2006), multi-source feedback (Smither et al, 2003), and emotional intelligence (Jay, 2003). A literature review of the research front shows that these studies focus mostly on a single or a few tools. We are not aware of any published studies about the effect of coaching on change in managers’ behaviour and where they learn about many tools and then select the tools they prefer to implement in their work.

Management training and development involves supporting and challenging employees to reach goals (Berg, 2008). The manager’s toolbox includes all instruments and techniques that a manager can use in such situations. As listed in Table 1, in this study we have selected a few such tools, divided into old and new tools. The old tools consists of well-known means such as goal setting, emotional intelligence, empowerment, feedback, conflict management, identifying talents and strengths, self-leadership, and situational leadership. The new tools is derived from positive psychology (Seligman, 2002) and positive organizational scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003), and depicts signature and character strengths such as courage, self-discipline, holistic thinking, and wisdom. It also includes positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, optimism, confidence, and self-efficacy. In this study we refer to these tools as the manager’s toolbox, even though we acknowledge that the content is far too limited to really represent a topic as broad as a leadership toolbox.

Table 1. Selected leadership tools

<i>Old tools</i>	<i>New tools</i>
Goal setting	Signature and character strengths
Emotional intelligence	- Courage
Empowerment	- Self-discipline
Feedback	- Holistic thinking
Conflict management	- Wisdom
Identifying talents and strengths	- Emotional intelligence
Self-leadership	Positive emotions
	- Joy
	- Optimism
	- Gratitude
	- Confidence
	- Self-efficacy

Goal setting

Goals can provide motivation, meaning and direction in life. Clear and challenging goals lead to better implementation. The more demanding the target is, the greater the joy when reaching the target. The highest commitment to the goal is achieved when the individual is convinced that the goal is important and can be reached. The goals are most effective when the feedback points out progress (Locke and Latham, 2002).

Emotional intelligence

According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), emotional intelligence represents four abilities: The ability to perceive, appraise and express emotion accurately and adaptively; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate cognitive activities and adaptive action; and the ability to regulate emotions in oneself and others. This implies the ability to process emotional information in an appropriate way and use this information to guide, for example, cognitive problem solving and to focus energy on the required behaviour (Salovey et al., 2002). Goleman (2008) takes a different view and divides emotional intelligence into four skills: 1) self-awareness (understanding oneself), 2) empathy (understanding others), 3) self-management (collaborate with oneself), and 4) relationship management (collaborate with others). This tool is included both in the old and the new toolbox.

Empowerment

Empowerment can make it easier for employees to develop knowledge and skills, and become more aware of their values. This helps the employees to define their needs, increase their autonomy and take responsibility for their own development (Varekamp et al., 2009). Empowerment may lead to employees taking responsibility for achieving personal and organizational goals.

Feedback

An important source of learning is feedback. According to Goldsmith and Keilty (2000), the better the management staff follows up and provides feedback, the more disposed employees are to change their behaviour. Crane (1999) believes that 80% of the feedback should be positive, and 20% filled with constructive ideas for improvements. One important reason why leaders often fail to provide feedback is that many managers want to be liked by their colleagues (Goldsmith, 2000).

Conflict management

Thomas (1976) defined conflict as: “The process which begins when one party perceives that another has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his”. This definition of conflict was developed as a previous definition failed to specify the beginning of a conflict and still stay broad (Thomas, 1992). Thomas (1976) distinguishes between five strategies for conflict resolution: avoidance, withdrawal, confrontation, collaboration, and compromise.

Identifying talents and strengths

Talents are naturally recurring patterns of behaviour, cognitive patterns and emotional patterns that can be used productively. The talent already exists within the individual. It can be described as a source for the development of individual strengths. Knowledge and skills are required for fostering strengths, however, strengths can be learned (Hodges and Clifton, 2004). In other words, if one uses what one can do best, this may lead to increased productivity and increased satisfaction (Clifton and Harter, 2003).

Self-management

Individuals can pretty much decide what to think and how to act. Cognitive strategies are about leadership of own thoughts, and behavioural management strategies are about leadership of own behaviour (Manz and Sims, 2001). Individuals can change their own thoughts, beliefs and assumptions in order to improve their psychological well-being and joy (Beck and Emery, 1985). The basic assumption is that our feelings are “governed” by our

thinking. Thus, the challenge is not the unpleasant feelings in themselves, but the thoughts that led to these feelings (Ellis, 1994).

Signature and character strengths

Actions are colored by the individual's character. There are two types of character: Good character and bad character (Seligman, 2002). Examples of character strengths are courage, self-discipline, holistic thinking and wisdom. These are potential signature strengths for an individual. Signature strengths are a more detailed breakdown of the character strengths. An individual typically experiences motivation, energy and joy when using signature strengths. Seligman (2002) argues that the chance of successful task performance increases when using signature strengths. These act as buffers against mental illness and are possibly keys to increased emotional resilience (Masten, 2001).

Positive emotions

Examples of positive emotions are joy, optimism, gratitude, and self-efficacy. Positive emotions, create positive development spirals that extend and increase our thought and action repertoires (Fredrickson, 2001). According to Fredrickson (2001), experiences that evoke positive emotions, also diminish negative emotions. Happy people are more persevering with tasks that are unpleasant. Furthermore, happy people are also better at doing several things simultaneously (multi-tasking) and are also more systematic and attentive (Diener, 2001). Positive emotions are correlated with performance-enhancing variables like creativity, less negative stress, better health, holistic thinking and emotional resilience (Fredrickson 2001).

Research methodology

We are seeking to understand subjective experiences and meanings among managers. For this purpose a qualitative methodology with a case study was chosen, which is especially useful for exploratory research where an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in its context is desired (Yin, 2009). It is a method which emphasises sense making by both the participants (managers) and the researcher. This is a particularly suitable approach when the research is seeking to throw light on how individual manager perceives a specific situation they are facing and what leadership behaviour and tools they choose to apply.

The workplace study was carried out with 14 participants from a multinational company on the Fortune 500 list. The sample members, consisting of 12 males and 2 females, were all middle managers and project managers with many years of leadership experience. Their education backgrounds included mostly a master's degree in business administration or engineering. They were all involved in the training program with the purpose of developing a more coaching leadership style.

Before the training started we conducted a study among the participants and the participants' superiors. The purpose was to get an overview of the challenges that the participants faced. On the basis of this data collection we decided what tools might be most appropriate to acquire for the participants. Additionally, we will highlight the inclusion of concepts and ideas from positive organizational scholarship when we designed the training program.

As illustrated in Figure 1 the training program consisted of five two-day seminars in 2010. The participants were given several introductions about the different tools in the manager's toolbox. Instead of traditional lectures, it was a learning process where questions were raised, tests were conducted, cases were discussed and solved, and feedback was provided. The

participants were involved in their own learning process and had responsibility for their own development.

During the seminars the participants practised team and peer coaching and this offered the participants an opportunity to become familiar with each other, and thus be able to give and get useful feedback. Team coaching was performed as the primary learning methodology in order to give all the participants insight into the leader’s toolbox, i.e. empowerment, conflict management, etc. Then, peer coaching was practiced by participants coaching each others in groups of three, where the third person acted as an observer (“devil’s advocate”) who gave feedback on the process. The participants in each of the groups were also changed. When performing the coaching an appreciative inquiry approach was applied (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Appreciative inquiry is defined as *the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate and heighten positive potential*. This process implies identifying, focusing and releasing potential in the organization, thus seeking out the specific elements in the organizational context that will contribute to the achievement of the chosen goals.

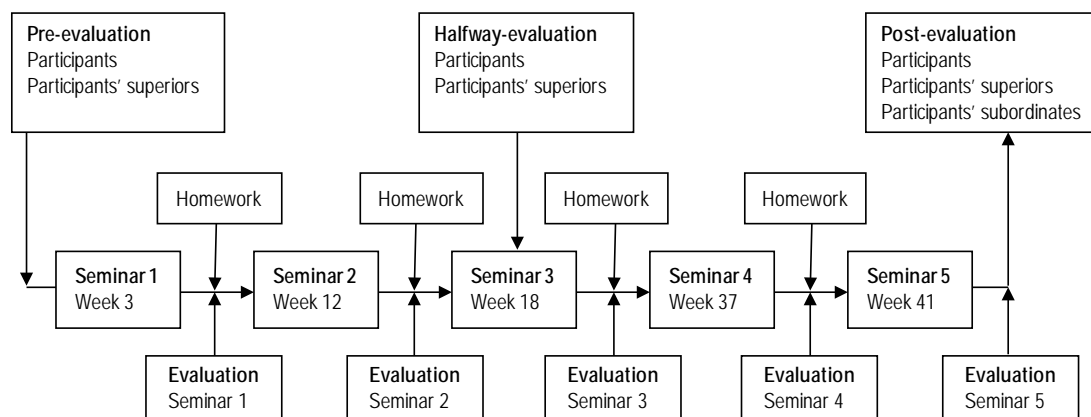


Figure 1. Research schedule

Between each seminar the participants were given homework assignments. The participants were asked to practice three leadership tools at the workplace. At the next seminar the participants had to explain how they had used the three tools, the results that had been achieved, why they achieved these results, and what they had learned from this practice.

The seminars were led by two external trainers with an international ICF (International Coach Federation) certification. Their role as coach and supervisor were to: a) Develop a good learning environment characterized by trust, openness and respect; b) Present, discuss and practice the different leadership tools; c) Challenge and support the participants to practice peer coaching and team coaching; d) Demonstrate how a coaching conversation can be conducted; e) Give the participants feedback on behaviour and performance; f) Support the participants to select the appropriate tools to try this out in practice, but also to reflect on the experiences with the use of a specific tool; and g) Motivate and inspire to progress and success in the learning process.

Before the training program started we did a pre-evaluation where we interviewed the participants’ superiors about what he/she believed that the subordinate was particularly skilled at as a manager, and what the subordinate should improve to become a more proficient leader.

We also interviewed the participants about what he/she perceived as his/her strengths of management, obstacles to further development as a leader, what advice they would give themselves to become even more skilled as a leader, as well as expectations and wishes to the training program. Halfway in the program we performed another evaluation as illustrated in Figure 1, where we asked the participants and the participants' superiors about how they had experienced the learning process so far, to what extent it was possible to point out any effects of the learning process, and any tips and advice for the further process. After the training program we did a post-evaluation where we interviewed the participants and the participants' superiors and subordinates about the effect of the training program at the workplace. In addition, interviews with the participants were conducted immediately after each of the five seminars. The purpose of this evaluation was to collect information about what they had learned at the seminar, positive and negative views concerning the seminar, but also suggestions about how to improve the seminar.

The total number of subordinates that the participants managed was 98, although the number of subordinates that each individual participant managed varied, ranging from 1 to 25. Of these only 33 responded to our study. Feedback showed that several of subordinates hesitated to respond. Part of the reason was that the number of subordinates was so few that he/she was afraid of being recognized. Another reason was that several of the participants were not interested in getting any feedback from their employees. We received data from 12 superiors, while one of the participants had no leader at the moment and another participant had very little contact with the superior.

In most evaluations we used a semi-structured interview guide which was built on Seidman's (1998) three-stage interview process with the purposes of setting the context and background; providing details of the experience; and reflecting on meanings. Further, Seidman (1991) argues that collecting personal experiences, opinions and meanings from those intimately involved is the only way of getting near the truth. In addition, the semi-structured interviews were chosen because of the method's flexibility (Drever, 1995), while it also allows for a degree of standardisation (Gilham, 2000). In addition to the interviews, we also conducted a questionnaire survey and observed the participants. The survey instrument included forced-answer questions with two scales; one ranging from 1 to 10 (results presented in Table 2-5), and another ranging from 1 to 5 (results presented in Table 6-8). During the observations notes were taken and after the seminars a more supplementary observation protocol was written.

After each seminar collected data was analysed. This created new understanding and questions, which were brought to the next seminar and further data collection. After the data collection period we continued to interpret the interviews and observations. The data was analysed in an interplay between empirical findings and theoretical concepts, where critical questions were asked and new conclusions made. In this process we applied Kirkpatrick's (1998) model for training program evaluation which consists of four levels: Reaction level, learning level, behaviour level, and results level. However, we are aware that there are some critics to this model. For example, Phillips (1997) believes that four levels are too narrow to conduct complete evaluations of firms. He proposes a fifth level, return on investment (ROI). It is our view that it is challenging to measure this level since it is difficult to separate the internal causes from changes in context such as the competitive situation, etc.

In the discussion section we present some quotes from the interviewees. The rationale for selecting these quotes was that they represent several of the participants' view, they support and highlight findings, and they make the discussion richer and more interesting.

Limitation of the study

We realize that this study may have several weaknesses. First, we are aware that there are several sources of errors in self-reporting about management training effects (Solansky, 2010). For example, participants may want to show their superiors that they appreciated the training and that they are grateful. The participants often spend much time attending the course, and by providing expressions of high learning they can justify the participation to oneself and others. Furthermore, Solansky (2010) argues that many participants would like to appear as good as possible and therefore they may come to understate behaviour that they believe is undesirable and overstate behaviour that they think is expected. To reduce these possible validity shortcomings of "self-reported bias" we collected additional data from the participants' superiors and subordinates. Additionally, we collected data through field observations. Second, we have not measured the use of the individual leadership tools among the participants. This means that it is difficult to be specific about the usefulness of a leadership tool compared to another tool.

Research results and discussion

1. Reaction level

The first level in Kirkpatrick's taxonomy is about subjective assessments of what participants make of their experiences with management training (Kirkpatrick, 1998). The participants' responses provide signals about how motivated they are and what can increase their motivation. Reactions can also form the basis for feedback to the participants. Furthermore, the reactions can lead to suggestions about how the process can be improved (Ely et al., 2010). In this research study we have specifically asked how the participants evaluate the coaching process. On a scale from 0 to 10 (very useful), data results show a high score of 8.9. This finding is in line with several other studies which demonstrate that participants are satisfied with the coaching process. McGovern et al. (2001) found that 86% of the participants were satisfied or very satisfied with the training process. Another study by Wasylyshyn (2003) showed that 75% of a sample of 87 managers responded positively to working with a coach. However, it should also be mentioned that prior research has only identified a few explanations why managers have such a positive reaction (Kampa-Kokesch, 2002).

Table 2. Results regarding the coaching process content

<i>What would you rate as very useful in the coaching process?</i>	
Manager's toolbox	(8 responses, 57%)
Many sessions	(5 responses, 36%)
Time for in-depth-study	(4 responses, 29%)
The structure	(3 responses, 21%)

In Table 2 the results about the content of the coaching process is listed. The results indicate that the participants are especially satisfied to have a large toolbox. During the coaching process these tools were presented and tested in real problem situations which the participants had experienced in their daily work. While no prior studies of a large toolbox have been found, there are several studies of a single leadership tool; for example feedback (Witherspoon and White, 1996), emotional intelligence (McGill, 2010), and goals (Locke and

Latham, 2002). We will argue that the introduction into a large toolbox can be one reason why the process is highly rated on the response level.

During the coaching process demanding challenges were discussed in small groups or under four eyes. An in-depth-study of pertinent problems was emphasized and the participants were given ample time to reflect on their own behaviour and to see new possibilities. We observed that this arrangement requires a high degree of involvement, but also gives a lot of opportunities to create practical solutions (cf. Table 3). This is underlined by the following comment from one of the participants:

“I liked that the coaching process was very interactive - all were forced to work with themselves - to reflect - and to have a home project to work on between the sessions”.

Feedback indicates that the participants are very satisfied with the learning method; data show a score of 8.9 on a scale from 0 to 10 (very useful).

Table 3. Results regarding learning method

<i>What would you rate as very useful in the learning method?</i>	
Good balance between theory and practical cases	(9 responses, 64%)
Involvement from all	(5 responses, 36%)
Group work and openness	(4 responses, 29%)
Time for discussion and reflection	(4 responses, 29%)

The group consisting of 14 members was divided into three smaller groups. The role as leader of the group and the role as “devil’s advocate” changed during the process. The results were participants who gradually got to know each other very well and they developed a high degree of transparency. During the process peer coaching in triads was emphasized. The participants worked with specific challenges and opportunities that each manager had experienced as leader. One participant had the role as coach and another participant was an observer and gave feedback.

The participants then worked as internal coaches. According to Hall et al. (1999), the benefits of internal coaches are that they often are cheaper, are familiar with the organization’s culture and strategy, and may have better qualifications to achieve an integration of the coach’s development in the organizational context. Feedback from the participants indicates that the training throughout the course resulted in an improved role as peer coach. Indeed, peer coaching was by several participants rated as the most important part of the learning method. However, observation also revealed the dilemma that such a learning process takes time and the importance of underlining confidence and trust. Considering this challenge, we will argue that effort should be put into the development of positive relations.

Observations showed that the participants developed, especially through peer coaching; trust, openness, a good atmosphere and positive emotions, and we will argue that this can explain the high score at the Kirkpatrick’s (1998) reaction level. The effect was that the participants developed courage to address specific challenges and opportunities they face at their workplace. Through insight into the toolbox and their own experiences, participants helped each other to work out concrete solutions. The result of such a process might be increased self efficacy. Self efficacy means the individual’s belief that he or she can perform a task

(Bandura, 1977). According to Hall et al. (1999) coaching also increases the feeling of self confidence among most leaders, and this can also explain the high score on the reaction level.

2. Learning level

According to Kirkpatrick (1998), the learning level means the degree to which participants believe they have learned something. This does not necessarily mean that they have changed their behaviour, but that they have gained more insight and understanding. Feedback from the participants show that all 14 report that they have learned much during the coaching process.

Table 4. Results regarding learning content

<i>What would you rate as the most useful you learned?</i>	
An overview of the manager's toolbox	(10 responses, 74%)
About specific tools	(10 responses, 71%)
Positive self-talk	(7 responses, 50%)
Self-knowledge	(6 responses, 43%)
Individual solutions	(6 responses, 43%)

As listed in Table 4, the participants rate as the most useful thing they have learned is to get an overview of the toolbox and insight into individual leadership tools such as empowerment, situational leadership and positive emotions. One interesting observation is that 50% of the participants stated that the most useful thing they have learned is positive self-talk. Further, feedback from the participants indicates that several try to "turn" negative thoughts, such as talk positively to themselves when they succeed. This is underlined by the following comment from one of the participants:

"For me, positive self-talk leads to positive thoughts, attitude, and behaviour that are contagious in the department. It becomes easier for employees to reach goals".

This technique is based both on self-management (Sims and Lorenzi, 1992) and self-coaching (Luciani, 2004), but is inspired by cognitive behavioural theory by Beck and Emery (1985), and Ellis (1994). The basic idea is that our feelings are "controlled" by our thoughts. The problem is not the unpleasant feelings themselves, but the thoughts that lead to these feelings. Examples of irrational thoughts may be:

- Everyone must appreciate me before I can appreciate myself.
- I have to do the job 110% accurately before I can accept myself.
- Everyone must treat me completely fairly and with full respect.

The purpose is to identify negative thoughts, distinguish between facts and beliefs, and stop listening to negative thoughts that may seem destructive. We argue that negative self-talk should be replaced with positive self-talk when this seems desirable. This method is part of the cognitive management theory (Sims and Lorenzi, 1992).

About 43% of the participants highlight self-knowledge as something they have learned. Interestingly, several mention that they now are more aware of their strengths, but also what they can improve. This is emphasized by the following statement from a participant:

"I have become more aware of my qualities as a leader and areas that I should improve to become a better manager for my employees. I have also become a more reflective manager".

This observation is in line with McGill (2010) who argues that coaching promotes emotional intelligence for instance by increasing self-awareness and emotional control.

Additionally as Table 4 displays, 43% of the participants also emphasize that he/she has to find his/her own way to practice leadership. A leader should not copy others, but must build on his/her own strengths. This is signified by the comment:

“No matter what tools to be used, it is my way of doing it that is most important”.

Another participant made the following statement:

“I have to be myself and find my way”.

This is an interesting observation that is in accordance with Linley et al. (2010) who argue that leaders have to build on their strengths and not their weaknesses.

3. Behaviour level

The third level in Kirkpatrick’s taxonomy is to which degree the management training has influenced the participants’ behaviour (Kirkpatrick, 1998).

Table 5. Results regarding behaviour

<i>How do you function as a better leader?</i>	
General use of the toolbox	(7 responses, 50%)
Self awareness	(5 responses, 36%)
Positive emotions	(4 responses, 29%)

Data from the interviews show that most of the participants make use of tools such as setting clear goals, prioritizing, delegating, giving praise, and providing feedback. Interestingly, some also point out that they now are more aware of how they behave in different situations. This means that they can use the various tools in a more appropriate manner. This is underlined by the following statement from a participant:

“Now I am more aware of the use of tools; I focus more on giving feedback such as praise and constructive criticism. Furthermore, I try to be conscious about empowerment. I also think I have become more conscious of being clear about priorities and goals. I plan my week in a better way; make agreements with myself in the calendar and leave out less important things”.

A few participants also respond that they have improved their positive emotions. It means that they have focused on developing themselves and their subordinates to become more secure in their role, for example be able to maintain calm when there is a crisis. As one of the participants said:

“I have become more secure and confident in myself and my leadership style”.

Feedback also indicates that some of the participants have focused on the creation of more joy at the workplace. Positive emotions have also improved when participants comment that they now are more positive to the challenges they face. We will argue that this is an important development because this will have a positive rub-off effect on the rest of the organization.

Data from the interviews have also revealed that those managers who have changed their behaviour are very clear on what kind of leadership tool to use. In the contrary case, it is our view that those who have not changed their behaviour may experience a very busy workplace with limited opportunities to reflect on leadership behaviour and how to do something about their situation. The solution can be a good coaching relationship characterized by trust, contact and personal chemistry, collaboration, and binding commitment (Ely et al., 2010). According to Curran (2008), the chances of learning and changed leadership behaviour dramatically increases when there is a good emotional relationship between the coach and the manager who is learning. This is also underlined by Crichley (2010) who claims that a coach can have a major impact on the emotional well-being of the coachee.

When we asked the participants' subordinates whether their managers have become better leaders, the answers vary greatly (cf. Table 6). The analysed response can be grouped into three main categories: In the first category, the vast majority report a higher degree of employee orientation. According to subordinates the participants have been better at motivating, praising, creating job satisfaction, involving, listening, communicating, and giving support and feedback. Others also report fair personnel management and engagement in professional development as changed behaviour. This is underlined by the following comment from a subordinate we interviewed:

“He is highly skilled in personnel management showing a comfortable and fair treatment”.

Another interviewee stated:

“He is trying to do the best for the employees to increase the job-satisfaction”.

Table 6. The subordinates' view regarding behaviour

<i>The subordinates were asked to answer the following statement: “My manager now functions as a better leader, probably as a result of the management training he/she has participated in”.</i>	
Yes, absolutely	(11 responses, 33%)
Yes, but not sure	(11 responses, 33%)
Don't know, not sure	(7 responses, 21%)
No, but not sure	(2 responses, 6%)
No, absolutely not	(2 responses, 6%)

In the second category, it is emphasized that the manager has become more task-oriented. The feedback highlights that the manager now is clearer without being authoritarian, takes more initiative and is more effective, delegates more tasks, provides sufficient resources, and the organization of the department is improved. As one we interviewed said:

“My manager has become more visible and clear on the solutions he wants to go for”.

Another participant commented:

“Lately, he has made a good plan for the organization of the department, including the delegation of roles, tasks and responsibilities”.

The last category is about change in the participants' personal behaviour. According to the subordinates, the manager seems to have acquired greater self-confidence, makes decisions

faster, and is more patient and more secure in his/her work. However, we also received some critical comments, for example one subordinate stated:

“Training of managers is and will be challenging: the intention is of course good, but it’s easy to fall back to old sins and habits”.

There can be three conditions that characterize the managers who have not changed their behaviour. First, the managers have an external locus of control. They think that what happens in the environment is beyond their control. The focus is on tasks that must be addressed immediately. The managers find it very difficult to influence co-workers, their own management, procedures, organization, etc. We will argue that these are managers with low self-efficacy. This means that the managers have little faith in the ability, motivation and resources to make changes. The second explanation is that these are managers who seem to be coloured by self-serving bias (Daft and Lane, 2011). When something goes well, they overstate the significance of their own efforts. In the contrary case, when something goes wrong, they argue that it is because of problems in the environment which is outside their control. We will argue that these managers are too passive, especially when he/she also has external locus of control and low self-efficacy. The third argument is that these managers prioritize the relationship with the superior. They are also very sensitive to how the superior assesses their behaviour. A classic example is the superior who calls the manager and would like to have a conversation. Even if the manager is in a meeting with his/her staff, he/she cancels this meeting to take the meeting with the superior. Furthermore, research indicates that these managers often experience that their superiors have little time for them, for example meetings to discuss the work and the workplace, but also to receive feedback regarding personal behaviour.

We also asked the participants’ superior whether the management training has changed their behaviour. The response, listed in Table 7, shows a divided view.

Table 7. The superiors’ view regarding behaviour

<i>The superiors were asked to answer the following statement: “My subordinate now functions as a better leader, probably as a result of the management training he/she has participated in”.</i>	
Yes, absolutely	(5 responses, 42%)
Yes, but not sure	(3 responses, 25%)
Don’t know, not sure	(1 response, 8%)
No, but not sure	(1 response, 8%)
No, absolutely not	(2 responses, 17%)

From additional interviews some superiors report that they have experienced that the participants have improved their use of tools such as delegation, communication, coaching, feedback and monitoring of employees. Data results also reveal changes in personal attributes such as more self-secure, more confident, secure in the leadership role, more outgoing, more relaxed in meetings, and more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. However, we will underline that the superiors are most likely to impact upon the participants’ satisfaction with their jobs, perception of the wider organization and the levels of engagement (Stairs and Galpin, 2010).

As a part of the data collection, we also interviewed the coaches to get their view of the management development program. From this we present a few interesting stories showing how the trainers experienced some of the participants.

The two first stories are about participants searching feedback and wanting to change their behaviour. A team leader, who was new in his current role contacted the program coaches to get personal feedback. He wanted specifically to know how he was perceived by others. He had been told that he seemed arrogant. Though this was not the coaches' impression, rather that he could seem a bit too quick and superficial at times. This surprised him. He was very performance oriented and would throw everything if a customer called him. According to the coaches he was a typical "GE – person", skillful at showing himself at meetings, very verbal and giving a self-confident impression. During the seminars he got the opportunity to reflect on questions regarding his own leadership style. In the final seminar he mentioned some challenges that had been discussed during the feedback session, as things to act on after the program, for example being a better listener, as well as finding the right balance between being a leader and thereby responsible for his subordinates and his customer focus. He also contacted other participants during program in order to discuss matters and get mentoring. The coaches' impression was that he had benefited from the management development program.

Another senior team leader, who had been a leader for decades, came to ask for direct feedback from the program coaches. During the first program module, he had stated that his goal was to listen more and stop interrupting as well as being more positive. To commit himself further he told his subordinates that he wanted to work on his behavior, listening more and reduce interrupting. He also told them about the program and that he wanted to develop his leadership style. During the 10 months program he did improve on his chosen goals as measured by subordinates and program coaches. This is particularly interesting as he was one of the oldest participants. He also expressed that he intended to send one of his subordinates to the program the upcoming year, - something that he actually did.

The third story is about participants being polite and the knowing doing gap. According to the coaches, the participants had a general tendency to be very polite and kind to each other, stressing that they did not know each other so well. When giving advice to each others, most participants were very careful. An example of such "misunderstood" politeness occurred when a participant acting as coach for a peer, assured the participant that he would be an excellent "leader of leaders". However, everybody including the participant, knew that he was struggling trying to cope with workload, demands and responsibilities. For instance he had not implemented the things he had agreed to do in the last program module, such as make list of specifications for resources by listing all work assignments and deadlines, that would require extra resources. It is assumed that the peer coach was not aware that the reassuring message sounded inappropriate at that specific moment, although the importance of offering direct and sincere feedback had been stressed by the trainers. According to the coaches, the participant seemed to lack a deeper understanding of the urgency of following through on agreed assignments. It might also illustrate the knowing-doing gap (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). To have a chance to be heard he would have to show metrics and facts regarding his need for resources. He seemed overwhelmed and too slow in doing so. On the other hand he was considered as technically skillful and a likable and nice guy.

Quite another case was observed in one of the youngest participants. He did not have the usual engineering background, but otherwise solid academic studies. He had worked his way up to team leader position from the floor in just a few years. According to the coaches he characterized himself as courageous in the first module. He aspired to be a leader, his goal

being “leader of business” in some years. At the same time he gave the impression of a sense of humility for the job. Lacking the technical knowledge he was obliged to delegate work to his subordinates. He was highly rated by subordinates, peers and superiors. However, he admitted that he had to work being more patient. He did sound reflecting during the program, and he tested out social gatherings, delegation and involvement on his subordinates, for example inviting a subordinate to meetings.

4. Result level

The fourth level in Kirkpatrick’s taxonomy is whether the management training has influenced the organization’s goals (Kirkpatrick, 1998). The organization’s main goal can include sales, profits, market share, customer satisfaction, and ROI (return on investment). However, according to Armstrong et al. (2007) there are few research studies about the actual use of ROI solely as a financial criterion. One reason might be that the calculations and the assumptions based on these criteria can be questioned (Armstrong et al., 2007). As a consequence, Fillery-Travis and Lane (2006) raise the question whether ROI is the correct way to measure coaching effectiveness. Although the organization is actively working with strategic plans and improved efficiency, it can take months and years before the effect is measurable (Ely et al., 2010). Another reason is the difficulty to isolate the impact of coaching and measure the effect (Trathen and Feller, 2011). As a result we have simply asked the participants about their assessment of achieved organizational effects (see Table 8).

Table 8. Effects of management training

<i>The participants were asked to answer the following statement: “The training will have a positive effect on the bottom-line in the department where I am responsible”.</i>	
Yes, absolutely	(8 responses, 57%)
Yes, but not sure	(2 responses, 14%)
Don’t know, not sure	(4 responses, 29%)
No, but not sure	(0 responses)
No, absolutely not	(0 responses)

The responses can be interpreted as an expression of high self-efficacy. However, we will argue that high self-efficacy increases the probability of success. This view is underlined by Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) who pointed out the importance of self-efficacy in an analysis of research during the last 20 years. Their analysis indicated that the leader’s self-efficacy explained 28% of the increase in the results that were achieved, while feedback answered for 14%, and clear goals for 10%. Although this type of analysis has several limitations, Ellinger and Bostrom (2002) claim that self-efficacy is an important factor for success.

Conclusion and practical implications

This paper has focused on how to practice management training and development of middle managers and project managers applying a coaching process. The training was based on real and significant challenges which the participants faced at their workplace. Data results showed that through team coaching the participants learned a variety of alternative solutions from the manager’s toolbox. This included tools such as emotional intelligence, empowerment, self-management, signature- strengths, and positive emotions. During the program the participants tested the most relevant tools at their workplace between the seminars. At the subsequent seminar participants debriefed how the tools were used, the

results that were achieved, what they had learned, but also what could be improved. In this process all participants took part in the discussion and provided feedback. Observations showed that the process led to a form of mutual self-reflection that reinforced and nuanced the learning. However, in order to work more on some challenges, the participants also made use of peer coaching.

We will argue that coaching as a training process and the manager's toolbox as learning content seems to be a promising area for the development of skilled managers, effective teams and competitive organizations. Indeed, team coaching and peer coaching as part of coaching appears particularly interesting. As for practical implications we recommend first that the participant's superiors and subordinates should be involved in the management training process. Second, we suggest that development of a good relationship characterized by trust, openness and respect should be emphasized, especially in a peer coaching situation. Then colleagues will be better to challenge and support each other, and give constructive feedback. What the other thinks is important to provide a basis for changing the mindset and the behaviour. Third, we recommend that the participants should have opportunity to practice what they learned in the training program at their workplace between the seminars. The reasons are both to learn their own way to practice the tools and to get their own experiences. Additionally, it contributes to continuous learning which is important in such a process.

Future research

Several proposals for future research are relevant based on the concerns of the current study. First, since peer coaching is not such a common method for management training and leader development, we suggest there should be more research on the outcome this method and how colleagues can help each other succeed. Second, an important condition for valuable results through coaching, is a good relationship between coach and coachee. However, we believe more research is needed on what characterizes a good relationship between coach and coachee in a peer coaching situation, and how to develop such a good relationship.

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