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Coaching in Higher Education - A generic training model to prevent stress

Annika Henningsson, MSc, University Lecturer, annika.henningsson@angstrom.uu.se
Uppsala University - Campus Gotland
Department of Engineering Sciences,
Division of Quality Sciences
SE-621 67 Visby, Sweden

Annika Henningsson is a lecturer in Quality Management. She earned her M.Sc. in Management Business System at Mid Sweden University. Her current interests are Quality Management and Coaching designed for development processes. Annika has a Black Belt in Six Sigma.

Maria Fredriksson – PhD, Senior University Lecturer, maria.fredriksson@angstrom.uu.se
Uppsala University – Campus Gotland
Department of Engineering Sciences
Division of Quality Sciences
SE-621 67 Visby, Sweden

Maria Fredriksson is a senior lecturer in Quality Management. She earned her M.Sc. in Political and Social Sciences and her Ph.D. in Quality Management at Luleå University of Technology. Her current interests are the combination of Quality Management and Sustainable Management.

Abstract

Background - In today’s fragmented world, university students often experience increasing pressure, which in turn lead to projected responsibility and increasing demands on university lecturers. For both students and lecturers this can cause stress. A basic prerequisite for success in the work with education is commitment, and visible and distinct “leadership”. The leaders, in this case are e.g., teachers and supervisors. Their most important role in the student’s development process is to motivate, coach and help developing individuals. Hence, it is significant to have functioning tools in order to lower the experienced stress level and to prevent illness, and at the same time encourage the individuals to take responsibility for their own developing process.

Purpose – This paper aims to present a tentative model for coaching students in order to give them insights in their own developing process.

Methodology/Approach: This paper is based on a combination of literature study and an investigation, in order to create a pilot study of a generic coaching model used in new surroundings. The model is then tested.

Findings - The study indicates that there are different uses for coaching models. These models can help develop behaviour, developing the individual, the process or an organization. There are also strong links between the studied coaching models and how organizational
development may be pursued. For example, the importance of interaction between the coach, leader (in this case the lecturer), as well as the student mentioned in the study, and can be translated into relationship. Further on, coaching for development of the individual and/or the process at the same time embraces respect for people and is adapted to the situation. A coaching model is usually phased. It is about a trust-based learning process that takes place between the coach and the recipient of coaching. This can be done through open, relevant framing of questions which should be based on the situation and the objectives. This conference paper suggests a generic training model based on the literature and an investigation.

**Practical Implications** - The major implication of the study is to emphasise that the students have the responsibility for their own development, but with the help of university lecturers and a coaching tool the appreciated stress and pressure can be processed.

**Value of the paper** – The study makes a contribution to the area of Quality Management in Higher Education and the toolbox for Teachers’ Leadership.

**Keywords:** Leadership in teaching, Coaching, Individual Learning, Quality in Higher Education, Toolbox for Lecturers.

**Article classification:** Research paper.
Background

In today’s fragmented world, university students often experience increasing pressure, which in turn lead to projected responsibility and increasing demands on university lecturers. For both students and lecturers this can cause stress and illness. A basic prerequisite for success in the work with education is commitment, and visible and distinct “leadership”. The leaders, in this case are e.g., teachers and supervisors.

In Lean includes visible leadership according to Liker and Convis (2012), which means that real-time information is to be treated and used in order to achieve a better result. Lean can be said to consist of continuous improvement and respect for people (Becker & Glascoff, 2013; Dahlgaard, et al., 2011; Ljungblom, 2012), which are two areas that challenge the traditional leadership (Whitmore, 2002). To keep up with a changing world and thinking continuous improvement the style of leadership needs to go from ruling to coaching. As individuals we are more aware than ever before about our situation and wish therefore to be more involved and responsible in our own development.

University lecturers’ most important role in the students’ development process is to motivate, coach and help developing the individuals. Hence, it is significant to have functioning tools in order to encourage the individuals to take responsibility for their own developing process.

How can students be helped in their development to be independent without “spoil” them? In this paper a model is described for coaching in business development (Henningsson & Wixenius, 2016). The model is adjusted for, and tested among Swedish university first year-students. Hence, the purpose with this paper is to present a training model for coaching students in order to give them insights in their own developing process.

1. How can a generic training model for coaching in higher education look like?
   i. What does coaching means?
   ii. What does a coaching model means?
   iii. How can a coaching model be used in a university course?
   iv. Can coaching prevent stress?

Delimitation of the research question is that the starting point is from the individual level, from the customer’s view. In this case the first year-university students and not from the leaders’ point of view.

Theoretical Frame of Reference

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a management system containing principles, methods and tools. The quality management system is about to prevent, change to the better and to improve goods, processes, services etc. TQM is based on the principles, also called the Cornerstones “Customer focus”; “Base decision on facts”; “Work with processes”; “create conditions for participation” and “work continuously with improvements”. The overarching principle “engaged leadership” is postulated if the others principles are going to work. Bergman & Klefsjö (2012)
One and major delimitation of theories made in this paper is the focus on the principles from Total Quality Management (TQM), in particular Leadership and then short about Kaizen and lastly the concept of coaching as a tool for leadership will be discussed.

Core values that are important elements in a successful quality strategy are suggested by Bergman & Klefsjö (2012), see Figure 1.

Figure 1. Suggested core values, which are important elements in a successful quality strategy. From Bergman & Klefsjö (2012, p. 40)

Values

The values of an organization should be clearly stated and express the principles upon which the mission will be achieved. Hellsten & Klefsjö (2000), define them as the basis for the culture of an organization, and name them “core values”, while Senge et al. (1994) call them “agreed-upon values”, and Kanji & Asher (1996) “core concepts for improvement”.

Values are guiding symbols that will help the participants to work toward the organization’s vision, picturing the desirable future (Deming, 1994; Senge et al., 1994; Kehoe, 1996; and Hellsten & Klefsjö, 2000).

- **Focus on the customers**
  According to Bergman & Klefsjö (2012), quality has to be valued by the customers, and the quality has to be put in relation to the customer’s needs and expectations. The authors state that there are both external and internal customers.

- **Everyone’s participation**
  All employees at all levels should be involved in the improvement work, which should be practised everywhere in the organization; see Dahlgaard et al. (1994).

- **Focus on processes**
  According to Dahlgaard et al. (1994); Egnell (1999) and Isaksson (2004), almost all organized activities may be seen as processes. The aim of a process is to deliver products or services that
satisfy customers. It is stressed that the focus is not on the results, because these are dependent variables.

- **Continuous improvement**
  Dahlgaard *et al.* (1994) suggest that continuous improvement of processes is necessary to increase customer satisfaction. See also Deming (1994).

- **Fact-based decisions**
  It is important to make decisions based on well-founded facts; see Tenner & DeToro (1992) and Bergman & Klefsjö (2012). In order to make right decision it is necessary to have as much facts as possible.

- **Management commitment**
  Quality improvements demand a total commitment by the management. Hellsten (1997), among many others, states that the management must be committed from the start, with initiating planning and participation in the work, including evaluation of both processes and results.

Leadership is described in most definitions as a process in which one or more persons deliberately affect the other. The purpose of leadership is to lead, structure and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization in a certain direction. Leadership describes also as a way to express visions, embody values and create an environment where there is constant change in processes. (Yukl, 2012)

**“Kaizen”**

The word “kaizen” is Japanese and means roughly ‘change for the better’. The meaning of “kaizen” is that everyone involved contributes continuously to the improvement of the different processes in the organization. “Kaizen” is a conscious systematic work towards improvements, with a focus on small steps at a time. Continuous improvement can, however, be extended to include large improvements as well; see also Juran (1995), Kanji & Asher (1996) and Imai (1997).

The “kaizen” philosophy is customer and process orientated. In the philosophy about “kaizen” there is an awareness of the necessity of satisfying the customers in order to keep the business alive and to be profitable. “Kaizen” is based on people’s commitment and participation through the use of the knowledge and experience of employees. This can be done, for instance, via quality circles. Kanji & Asher (1996), Imai (1997) and Bergman & Klefsjö (2003)

Ishikawa (1985) stresses that a deep personal commitment is essential for quality development, not the least from those who try to get others committed. Individual development and education are therefore necessary. The use of quality circles can be considered a methodology, supporting people to meet and to identify problems or possibilities for improvements. It was originally a way to spread knowledge and to provide education.

The engaged leadership is important for the success of the total quality management (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). Rother, (2013) means that development and learning takes place with the help of a leader or a mentorship. Leaders and managers are coaching staff and other leaders on the next administrative level in order to help them take the next step in their
leadership. See also (Berg, 2007; Rother, 2013 and Liker & Convis, 2012) for clarification and responsibility to succeed.

**Lean leadership**
The primary role of a Lean leadership is to motivate, coach and develop individuals (Ljungblom, 2012; Poksinska et al., 2013; Yukl, 2013). Ljungblom (2014) and Bäckström & Ingelsson (2015) also state that a Lean leadership changes focus on leadership from having developed processes to develop people. The changing role of the leader describes Ellström (2009) as a transition toward a more consulting character, where the key is to guide and encourage people to work on the improvements of the continuous processes, which o’ Broin & McDowall (2015 and 2016) mean happens through respect, understanding and dialogue.

Grant and Hartly (2013) describes that experiences of coaching is an important ability to possess as a leader. However, it is not a natural asset of all leaders. At the same time, a stimulating and supportive culture cannot be underestimated for carrying through coaching on daily basis mean McCarthy and Milner (2013). Despite a developing and supportive culture is there a gap between coaching of leaders and leadership theories according to Anderson (2013).

**Coaching**
Coaching is about a trust-based learning process that takes place between the coach and the recipient of coaching. A coaching model is based on the development of the human and/or the process. This is done through open relevant framing of questions which should be based on the situation and the objectives. There are different uses for coaching models. They can help to develop behaviour, to develop the individual, the process or the entire system. Coaching can be used as a tool for leaders. Henningsson & Wixenius (2016)

**Model for human development**
Coaching is according to Berg (2007) a model to help people succeed. Through questions, alternative suggestions and feedback, the coach help the coached, to develop his own talents and achieve goals. Whitmore (2002) believes that the coach's goal is to create awareness, sense of responsibility and self-esteem with the coached. In order to achieve results with coaching, the individual should be encouraged and helped to expand his thoughts repertoire, action repertoire, learning repertoire and emotional repertoire. (Berg, 2007)

- Thought repertoire involves acquiring mental maps to read, interpret, explore and understand the reality, including one and others.
- Action repertoire means being able to use the "Toolbox" so that you have many methods to choose from depending on the situation. The tools can be personal effectiveness, self-management or conflict management.
- Learning repertoire means better utilization of better learning methods such as role models, self-reflection and feedback. Experiment with new ways of thinking and existence.
- Emotion repertoire mean developing positive feelings such as patency, security, respect, appreciation, self-confidence, confidence in the future, hope, optimism and joy.

Berg & Karlsen (2012) consider that an easy way to coach involves asking three basic questions; where are you now? What do you want? Lastly, how will you get there? The
current situation needs to be interpreted to reach where the person stands today. The desired future situation must be clarified, and it is necessary to find out how the action will take place to achieve the wishes (Berg, 2007; Whitmore, 2002), see Figure 2.

**Figure 2** illustrates the three basic questions used when coaching, (based on Berg, 2007, p. 124).

Berg's (2007) generic coaching model well responds to what a coaching model is. In short, a coaching model is usually phase-divided. There is a prerequisite for creating a partnership in a coaching model. It is a trust-based learning process that takes place between coach and receiver of coaching. A coaching model is based on a development of man and/or the process. This is done through open, relevant issues that should be based on the situation and the objectives. It is a learning process that takes place through feedback, implementation and evaluation. Figure 3 illustrates Henningsson & Wixenius (2016) conclusion of what a coaching model is.

**Figure 3** illustrates what a coaching model is, (from Henningsson & Wixenius, 2016).
Lean is a strategy for business development where coaching can help. Lean focuses on workflow efficiency before resource efficiency to reduce waste in the entire chain (Modig & Åström, 2015). This shows in Toyota's model for leadership development through its core values (Liker & Convis, 2012). Coaching in particular that model are directed toward getting the flow to work as good as possible.

To take advantage of the coaching in development work with Lean (Hines et al, 2011) and to have the staff member open-minded to solutions it is essential that the leader is skilled in asking open and relevant questions. In order to get the employee aware of what has to be done a team-work with partnership need to be created based on mutual respect. Hence, the organization improves through development of new knowledge and new understanding.

**Portfolio**

Portfolio is a documentation tool mainly for the student but also for supervisors and teachers. It provides the opportunity to document, communicate and create forums that promote optimal learning in a structured way. Elmgren & Henriksson (2016)

According to Snyder (2016) Portfolio is a tool and a process that promotes deep learning in the short and long term. The purpose of the portfolio is to create an overall perspective of the student's learning and learning development. The portfolio used in this paper is inspired by Snyder (2016).

**Methodology**

Case study is an approach associated with the qualitative tradition. Here the researcher explores a single “phenomenon”, the case bounded by time and activity. The latter may be a programme, event, social group or process. In addition, the researcher collects detailed information by using different data collection procedures for a period of time. Yin (1994)

Yin (1994) notes further that case studies are preferred when questions like “how” or “why” are posed, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon in some real-life context. Because of the purpose of this paper, a case study approach is made.

Coaching as a concept can be used both at individual level and at group level, concretized by Berg (2007). Coaching activities such as asking questions, interpret the behaviour of an individual in this study is based on the individual as the focus is on developing the individual's own responsibility for their own development process.

As data collecting methods this paper is based on a combination of literature study and an investigation, in order to create a pilot study of a general coaching model used in new surroundings. Questions were asked and interpretation of the individuals’ behaviour was made. The appreciated value of preparation, motivation, expectations and the level of stress were investigated among first-year university students attending to a course at Uppsala University, Campus Gotland. The sources of information are a questionnaire and a portfolio.

The first part of the survey contains of questions about which education the student participate in, which course the respondent attend to at present, and which course they just have finished. In the second part of the questionnaire the students were asked to estimate different aspects they had appreciated when started the present course and the previous course. The third part
of the questionnaire you will find open-answers questions based on the situation and the objectives. The students wrote their own thoughts in a portfolio considering their learning and development process.

**Empirical Results**

*Results from the questionnaire*

In the investigated course 27 students were admitted, out of which 25 students have participated in the survey, which means 92.5%.

In the second part of the questionnaire, were the students asked to estimate different aspects they had experienced when started the present and previous courses. There were 25 respondents and the result is illustrated in figure 4.

*Figure 4* illustrates the preparation level on present and previous course.

Results based on learning repertoire and on questions; how well motivated were you at the start of current and previous courses. Distribution shows that the student had a lower level of motivation at the start of the current course.
Figure 5 illustrates level of motivation when start-up of current course and previous course. Results based on thoughts repertoire and on questions; what expectations did you have at the start of current and previous courses. Distribution shows that the student has lower expectations at the start of the current course.

Figure 6. The figure shows level of expectations at the start of current and previous courses. Results based on emotional repertoire and questions; what stress level did you experience at the start of current and previous courses. Distribution shows that the student had a slightly lower stress level at the start of the current course.
Figure 7. The distribution shows stress level at start-up of current and previous courses. In this third part of the questionnaire there were open-answers questions.

How would you prefer to work actively with your own learning? Some examples of answers:

I want to create a deeper understanding and have time to reflect upon the subject we are reading.

It never occurred to me, to work actively with my own learning. I thought it was what I was doing when studying.

An analysis was made, of the answers to the question about how students wish to work actively with their own learning, and some positive aspects were identified:

The respondents want to work actively with their own learning through

- Reflections
- Assignments
- To work in teams that vary
- Develop methods and structures

Results based on the question describe how you can implement your portfolio in current course. Some examples of answers are:

I can apply the portfolio in the current course by follow my own development in my learning.

I can use it to put up goals and reflect upon the portfolio and my way of working.

The respondents were asked to describe their thoughts on how they can apply the portfolio in the current course. An analyse and categorization based on phrases in the answers generates the following; the student wants to apply the portfolio in the current course to

- follow the personal development
- reflect and analyse
• plan and set goals

The next question was; describe your thoughts on how you can apply the portfolio in your future leadership. Some examples of the answers were:

*I think that the portfolio can be a good way for me to see how I develop. Using the method better and I get the benefit of it.*

*The thought is probably to continuously work with improvements with my own "mind set".*

*Think it's good to evaluate what has been done, so I plan to work with it in the future, if it is working well in this course.*

Based on the free answers on above mentioned question the following categorized words can be highlighted:

• reflect and analyse
• plan
• evaluate

*Results from the portfolios*

Some examples of students’ comments are given here. There was no exact question related to these answers. The answers are directly collected and cited, hence not linguistically corrected.

"I've had a tough week and therefore have not been able to get started with the task properly on time. However, I experienced the task rewarding but just like the last one that was very much to do the same thing on different headlines, you could reduce the number of parts to locate in standard and learn just as much. I'm not really happy with my efforts to this task. Then I feel it was very stressful because my week has not started so well and I shot up the task pretty much."

"Focus: the focus of the Group was to be completed, which became a stressful feeling for me."

"Implementation: During implementation I experienced it as stressful and uncomfortable because I didn't have the control I usually want. Which is something I have to work with - to let go of control."

"Identification: Questions I feel strong about in group work is not many when it became so stressful that it became. However, I feel it that I actually finally realized how I would build up a scenario around the requirements element. What I need to work on is to dare to say what I think and not let go of it for just anyone else think differently of me."

"I think the group assignments have worked quite well. Unfortunately, many of my classmates, have a very negative attitude to the course, which has meant that the assignments are "fix quick". However, I believe that together we have produced a product of good quality (which we also received evidence of when we have passed on the assignments). In the future I want to work more to motivate my team-mates not to focus on the negative, and instead focus on what the course can give them (and myself) that education "."
"The aim of the task was to answer the specified reflection questions. Responses should be
developed and reflective. I thought the task was easy because I am good at analyzing and
reflecting. By reflection creates a greater awareness because it can create connection
between cause and effect and this creates a visibility. My focus was on using my own thoughts
and link these to the theories. I wanted to depart mainly from myself and write what I
considered to be most important and that I give priority."

"It was fun to reflect on myself and to actually think about what I have learned about my
learning and how to work with it in the future. The task was for me very rewarding and it's
fun to have in the future when you can go back and check out how I saw on my own
learning."

“I appreciate to sit and listen to the lectures in order to take in the information and reflect it
in my head. I would prefer not to make any presentation of something that I don't feel
confident with. Partly because I'm not sure about the topic after reading on about it for 30-60
minutes, and partly because I don't want to give out the wrong information to my class-
mates.”

"No it didn’t work as I had imagined because of that I did not understand the instructions for
the examination. They were unclear and difficult to understand. The reason it didn't work was
because I didn’t put down enough time on the exam and I started too late and as a result, I
could only do the ones I thought were correct. If I had started even earlier I had been able to
get into the task properly and been able to work for a higher rating."

Based on the free answers randomly chosen the following categorized sentences can be
highlighted:

- The student is not planning their time and should start working earlier with the
  assignment
- Instructions to the assignments are perceived as unclear
- Student wants to listen to the lectures and not be active
- Time for reflection is given
- The team has a negative attitude to the assignment and perform it quickly

Discussion and Conclusions

How can students be helped in their development? The purpose with this paper is to present a
training model for coaching students in order to give them insights in their own developing
process. The purpose is operationalised through answering the following questions:

1. How can a generic training model for coaching in higher education look like?
   i. What does coaching means?
   ii. What does a coaching model means?
   iii. How can a coaching model be used in a university course?
   iv. Can coaching prevent stress?

The answers to the first two research questions in this paper is that coaching is about a trust-
based learning process that takes place between the coach and the recipient of coaching. A
coaching model is usually phased. There are different models and normally coaching is used
in business organizations i.e., “working life”. However, in this paper the investigation deals with first year-university students who tested a coaching model.

It is interesting to see that the stress level is not high in when starting up the current or previous course. The values obtained in response in the survey of perceived stress level can be considered as low. The difference in perceived stress level is marginal for current and previous course and is within the scope of normal distribution and measurement deviation. This means that the values presented in this report are not useful to draw any conclusion about how a new course will affect the student's perceived level of stress. The repertoire of emotions means to develop positive feelings, such as openness, safety and self-confidence. Feelings and perceived level of stress need to be more investigated.

It can be argued that coaching through the use of deep learning via a portfolio (i.e., reflection and insight) can help students. The model's purpose is not primarily to see what level the individual resides on, (the current situation) or the appreciated level of stress level. Rather, the tool called portfolio should be used with the purpose to help the student to awareness that there are multiple ways of working to achieve a desired goal. This can be done through a learning repertoire and positive aspects such as to reflect, analyse, plan and evaluate, in order to reach the goal.

Learning repertoire (see the coaching model - long term), which means that the student work with reflection and evaluation. These aspects can be linked to students’ development through the use of the portfolio. It can also be seen as a learning method that contains the reflection and self management, especially when it comes to the values base decision on facts and committed leadership linked to TQM.

One conclusion is that coaching can be done through a generic coaching model. Whether it prevent stress is not possible to answer after one investigation. However, it can be of significant value in identifying what it is that causes stress. The findings may be due to poor planning, unclear instructions and that the students have a negative attitude to the (Group) data and implement them quickly.

Other conclusions in this paper are that the work with students learning process is connected to the cornerstones of TQM. Focus on customer means here that the student is the customer in focus and is having a tool. The tool is here a coaching model, which in turn describes the importance of interaction between the coach, leader, employee and customer. To coach each other throughout the chain leads to process development. Further on, coaching can help developing the recipient’s ability to interpret situation and identify problem, which helps when decision made on facts should be taken. Coaching and mentorship is crucial for development of and engage employees. Here the students gets involved in the own learning process, by using the portfolio as basis for participation. There is also a connection to the principle of continuous improvement. All models for coaching are about improving individual or process. The investigation shows that the students want to work with plan and continuous improvement. The portfolio is the tool. Connection to the last, but perhaps most important principle is the engaged leadership. Coaching is about a trust-based learning process that takes place between the coach and the recipient of coaching. A coaching model is based on the development of the human and/or the process. It is essential that top management and leaders is engaged. This is a tool for leadership.
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