

## A Journey of Learning: Reflecting on Two Lenses of Leadership Development\*

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### Abstract

This paper shares a personal reflection on engaging two leadership development lenses – Goleman’s (2000) leadership styles and Silsbee’s (2010) coaching voices - which have resonated with me as a facilitator of learning. The application and reflection has resulted in a heightening of self-awareness, enriching presence, allowing unlearning and relearning which continues to frame everyday practice and modus operandi. The intention of this paper is to open up new ways of reflective practice and thinking for the reader, encouraging reflection on possibilities for experimenting with integrating leadership styles and coaching voices into their practice. It is a reflective paper, not a critique of frameworks, drawing exclusively on two leadership development frameworks as interpreted and operationalised by the author, with relevance for educators, coaches and other professionals. A brief insight into Goleman (2000) and Silsbee’s (2010) frameworks is provided, while the focus is on sharing a personal journey of adapting and adopting these frameworks within a single context. The extent to which the reader reflects on the usefulness of these models, for their specific context, will be one measure of the paper’s effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Leadership, coaching, reflective practice, leadership development

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'We work on ourselves in order to help others; and also we help others in order to work on ourselves'

(Chöndrön, n.d., as cited in Silsbee, 2010, p. xv)

## 1. Introduction

As an advocate of reflective practice and a leadership development practitioner, this paper shares a personal application of Goleman's (2000) leadership styles (see Table 1) and Silsbee's (2010) Septet coaching model (see Table 2). An insight into one application of these models is intended to contribute to the discourse on their usefulness by educators and other professionals to enable self-development and the development of others. The words coach and educator are used interchangeably in this paper (discussion of educator as coach is for another paper!). The aim is to prompt the reader to critically reflect on these leadership styles and coaching voices, as tools, to develop themselves and others on their learning journey.

## 2. Reflection: a catalyst for pausing

Reflective practice is frequently attributed to Donald Schön (1983, 1987) who introduced this concept into the educational lexicon as he endeavoured to distinguish between dealing with predictable and unpredictable situations. Much has been contributed to this field of literature: Brookfield (1995) proposes looking through four lenses to direct reflection: self, students, peers and scholarly literature; McNamara and O'Hara (2008) argue that there is 'immense developmental potential' (p. 203) by exploring our own practice; Moon (2004) suggests that 'learning and the development of knowledge are the main outcomes of reflection, whether it is learning about the self or acquiring specific factual knowledge – 'know-how'' (p. 6); to name but some. In this time of frenetic change and unprecedented demands on individuals, the process of reflection has been a catalyst for pausing to ponder on one of my experiences of immersion in these leadership frameworks.

### **3. Beginning with an inner leadership journey**

Acknowledging that champions and critics contribute to a tsunami of literature on definitions and theories of leadership, Goffee and Jones (2000) have emphasised that leadership is contextually dependent, varying from context to context, while Bennis (2003) contends that leadership does not take place in a vacuum. This paper is not a critical reflection on leadership definitions and theories, champions and critics, it is simply setting out two (of many) lenses through which to view leadership development as a facilitator of learning. Recognising contextual sensitivity and accepting the premise that leadership begins as an inner journey - before one can lead others one has to lead oneself (Kouzes & Posner 2011) - provides a springboard for sharing this reflective account. Goleman's (2000) leadership styles dove-tailing with Silsbee's (2010) integrated Septet coaching model can inform this inner journey and act as lenses to anchor the self-reflection encouraged by this paper. 'A good teacher, like a good graduate', McAleese (2013) opines, 'is also an active learner, questioner and critical thinker' (p. 13).

### **4. Exploring the lenses of leadership styles and coaching voices**

Goleman (1998) advocates that 'IQ and technical skills are important, but emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership' (p.93). As in leadership, Carlile and Jordan (2005, p.21) argue, that emotion is now recognised as a major element in learning. IQ and technical skills, in the relevant discipline, are essential, described by Goleman (1998) as threshold capabilities. However, similar to leaders within the business environment, an educator's level of emotional intelligence – an individual capacity for self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, social skill – can impact on the student's level of engagement and motivation and inform the art of helping learners change (Knowles 1980). Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2001) argue that 'the leader's mood is quite literally contagious' (p.44) which endorses why reflecting on leadership styles and coaching voices can enrich or impede the learning.

#### 4.1 Flexing leadership style

Six styles of leadership were proposed by Goleman (2000) - coercive, authoritative (or visionary), affiliative, democratic, coaching, pace-setting (see Table 1) - arguing that a leader should be able to demonstrate at least four of these and be capable of moving between styles depending on the situation.

<i>Coercive</i>	demands immediate compliance
<i>Authoritative</i>	mobilizes people toward a vision
<i>Affiliative</i>	creates emotional bonds and harmony
<i>Democratic</i>	builds consensus through participation
<i>Pacesetting</i>	expects excellence and self-direction
<i>Coaching</i>	develops people for the future

Table 1. Leadership styles: modus operandi (Goleman, 2000, p.82-83)

Although Goleman's (2000) research was conducted on a random sample of executives in the last century, I would argue that these leadership styles can have wider application and are worth taking the time to reflect on. The outcome of this reflection will be, at least, an alternate questioning mind set, regardless of whether these styles resonate. An awareness and understanding of these styles allowed me experiment by reflecting on the following questions:

- To what extent do I tell others what to do?
- To what extent do I engage others in my vision?
- Do I prioritise people or task?
- To what extent do I ask for views of others?
- Do I expect consistent high standards from others?
- To what extent do I facilitate the development of others?

The outcome, an alternate mind set, created a greater self-awareness, recognising the need to demonstrate variety in leadership styles thus enriching learning for myself and others.

#### **4.2 Oscillating between coaching voices**

Silsbee's (2010) coaching model, the Septet model, is intended for practitioners in many professions involved in facilitating the development of themselves and others (p. xix), so although this paper focuses on looking through the lens of educator, the learning is equally relevant to individuals in leadership positions in workplaces responsible for leading and developing others. This is an integrated coaching model which comprises "The Seven Voices" – Master, Partner, Investigator, Reflector, Teacher, Guide and Contractor – representing various roles that coaches play throughout the coaching process. Table 2 sets out Silsbee's (2010, p.65) description of each of these voices.



	MASTER
	Maintains self-awareness; Listens with focus and presence; Models learning and growth; Embraces the client with compassion and respect; Chooses which of the operational voices to use at a given time
	PARTNER
	Establishes and honours an explicit structure for the coaching relationship; advocate shared commitment of competency-based coaching outcomes; offers choice points, and makes joint decisions about the coaching process
	INVESTIGATOR
	Asks questions that shift the client's understanding of the situation; asks the client to articulate desired outcomes; asks the client to generate courses of action
	REFLECTOR
	Provides direct and honest feedback; directs the client's attention towards his or her capabilities or potential; encourages self-observation and reflection
	TEACHER
	Provides new distinctions, information and knowledge; challenges and stimulates the client's thinking process; explains the coaching process, theory, and models being used
	GUIDE
	Encourages the client to take some action of the client's choosing; offers options for action; recommends specific courses of action
	CONTRACTOR
	Establishes clear agreements about actions; explores and resolves client doubts and hesitations; follows up with client about agreed-on actions

Table 2. Elements of coaching voices (Silsbee, 2010, p.65)

The movement between these voices, in my experience, was dictated by the dynamism of the classroom conversation and my awareness of what was going on, for both myself and the students, throughout the process. During a lecturing engagement many roles were fulfilled – from establishing expectations, teaching, questioning, listening, facilitating, reflecting, summarising, to name but some. As I took time to practice applying these voices, I became more unconsciously competent and the shift between these voices became more fluent.

The Master, as defined by Silsbee (2010) is the first voice and the place from which all the other voices flow. This is about being present, being aware of the emerging needs of the student or client and shifting into a different voice – Partner, Investigator, Reflector, Teacher, Guide and Contractor (see Table 2) – to provide best service to the student. Different voices take the lead at different times, for example the Partner focuses on sharing responsibility for the learning relationship; the Investigator uses different frameworks (e.g. GROW model) to understand the student goals; the Reflector offers feedback and brings the mirror to the student or client; the Teacher introduces new language and distinctions for the student or client; the Guide offers ideas for action; the Contractor “encourages mutual responsibility” (Silsbee, 2010, p.61) and is evident at the start of a learning programme when establishing goals and what success will look like.

Silsbee (2010) emphasises that to be an educator to another individual is a privilege which carries responsibility for the well-being of that individual, however engaging with the process of self-development (an inner journey) is essential to truly serve and empathise with others. Reflecting on the application of these voices, I introduced an eighth voice, the Listener, which complements Silsbee’s (2010) septet (Figure 1). Actively listening is an essential component to look through the students’ eyes as advocated by Brookfield (1995) and in my view warrants a single voice to give it due attention as a foundation to these other voices.

Figure 1 captures my gathering of these leadership styles and coaching voices providing lenses for reflection and action while navigating leadership and educational moments within daily practice. The ability to flex leadership styles (Goleman, 2000)

and oscillate voices (Silsbee, 2010) were key learning outcomes from my single interpretation and adoption of these frameworks.

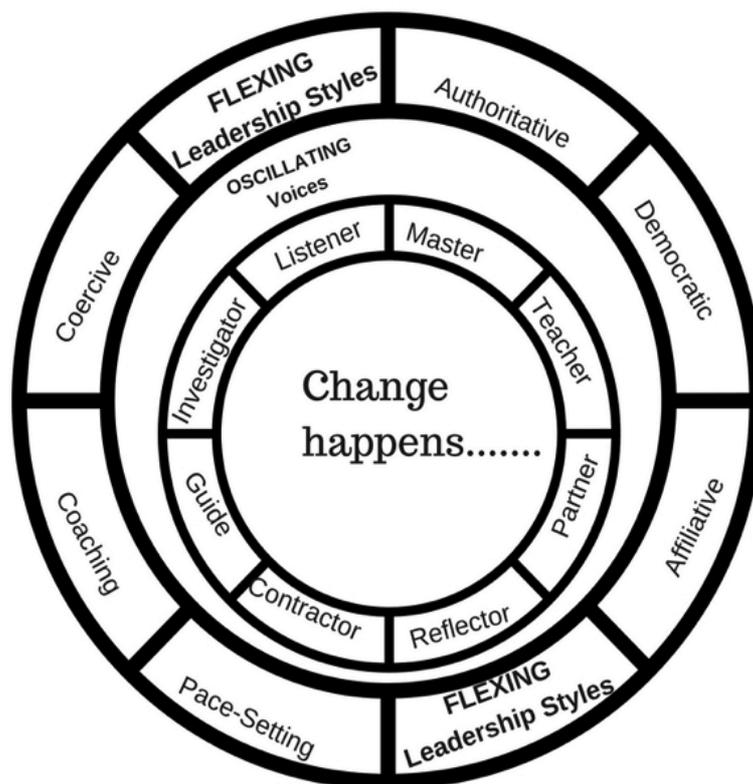


Figure 1. Connecting Leadership Styles and Coaching Voices  
(adapted from Silsbee (2010); Goleman (2000))

## 5. Putting leadership styles and coaching voices into practice

These frameworks were applied and observed during delivery of a twelve week module on Strategic Management to part-time post graduate learners. During this application, these models were adapted to this single context with a single interpretation while recognising that alternative interpretations may be considered by

the reader. There is not one recipe for all, it is the ingredients that have created a new awareness, posing challenges, causing pause and reflection, to the unfolding of my way of being as an educator. Reflective practice ignites change, recognising that new ways may need to be established to adapt to the change as De Mello (1997) opines “the nature of rain is the same, but it makes thorns grow in the marshes and flowers in the garden” (p. 6).

Week 1, introduced the module, requiring **affiliative** style to engage students from the outset, complemented by **authoritative** to mobilise students towards the author’s vision for the journey being embarked upon. The voices of **Master** and **Listener** were essential foundations to maintaining self-awareness and observing what was taking place within the classroom. In parallel, oscillating between voices of **Partner**, where I began to build a working relationship with students, and **Contractor**, agreeing ground rules and expectations. As the weeks progressed, **democratic** style became crucial as I encouraged participation, asking students ‘what do you think?’ which Tom Peters (2010) advocates are the four most important words in an organisation. The voices of **Teacher**, **Guide**, **Investigator**, **Contractor** and **Reflector** were interchanged throughout these weeks with a prominent **coaching** leadership style as I endeavoured to cultivate self-awareness in students. Educating the students in the concepts and content of Strategic Management called on the voice of **Teacher**, while directing and guiding them through the wilds of this topic was my **Guide** voice in action. Weekly insights into real-time strategy in organisations required the questioning voice of **Investigator** which was equally mirrored by students who collaborated to endeavour to make sense of real-time events. The voice of **Contractor** was challenged throughout the module as I reached out to seek student commitment to weekly readings to inform the subsequent class. Feedback, was the **Reflector** voice looking into the mirror, thinking about what worked well, what did not work so well and what was missing, the presence of which would have made a difference. There was a place for **pace-setting**, to energise the classroom climate, and **coercive** in establishing expectations of students, aiming to achieve and contribute to the best of their ability and at times, coercing students to diligently pursue assignments and critiques.

Application required thinking about each situation and the desired learning outcome, listening to students and then selecting which style or voice best suited the context and outcomes – evidence of pausing and reflection in action. Competence and ease in application did not happen instantly, it required consistent commitment to cultivate change by doing one thing differently each week to scaffold the learning. Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2001) argue that ‘a leader must rehearse a new behaviour until it becomes automatic – that is, until he has mastered it at the level of implicit learning’ (p.51). Consistent commitment to engagement in self-monitoring and self-regulating cultivated change and enabled progress through the learning process. Engaging in reflective practice cultivates learning, unlearning and relearning when handled well, however poor handling, Kotter and Rathgeber (2006) argue can put oneself and others at risk. Egan & Costello (2016) assert that reflection allows teachers ‘gain insight into personal strengths and limitations which consequently can be of benefit when focusing on enhancing the knowledge, skills and dispositions of their learners’ (p.2931).

## 6. Conclusion

Change begins, by changing one thing, as advocated by Dublin Institute of Technology’s (DIT) ***Change 1 Thing by Spring*** initiative, ‘designed to encourage colleagues to think of, and apply, teaching practice changes that make a positive difference to student learning’ (DIT, 2015). Taking time to engage with Goleman’s (2000) leadership styles and Silsbee’s (2010) coaching voices were catalysts for me to explore doing one thing differently. By continuously learning, committing and doing, Covey (1992) asserts, we continue to grow and develop. Within the context of your practice, what one thing has this paper encouraged you to think of, explore, apply or discontinue?

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