

Flow beyond Systems: Development through Somatic Intelligence

Editors: Maria Spindler and Tonnie van der Zouwen

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Jakob Rømer Barfod and Bjarne Bakkegaard

Practical Leader Development Program Using Emotional Intelligence

“In the end, the difference here between life and death, mission accomplishment and failure, is leadership.”

(Ramthun & Matkin, 2014: 251)

Abstract

The Danish Army has more than ten years of experience working with developing emotional intelligence in the Royal Danish Army Officers' Academy (RDAOA), and the Academy has developed military leaders who have benefitted from emotional intelligence training. Today many of the military leaders are better at understanding themselves as well as their ability to build relationships whilst under great pressure e.g. during combat operations. On the basis of field experience, qualitative research and quantitative data the effects of working with emotional intelligence in a structured way is presented and discussed using a social constructionism approach – how does using the notation about emotional intelligence affect and give meaning in organizations? The novelty of this leader development program is developing leaders working in organizations under extreme pressure (war). We will try to tie in with this issue's theme of 'Flow Beyond Systems: Development through Somatic Intelligence' by showing how emotional intelligence can create meaning at different levels by connecting situational awareness to intelligent action and decision-making.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, military, relational leadership, follower-ship, high intensity context, social constructionism, situational awareness.

1 Why Train Military Leaders in Emotional Intelligence?

Around mid-2000 the Danish Army developed a new leader development program based on emotional intelligence with a changed leadership focus, which could help military leaders to get better followership and to be able to participate in operations abroad in a more meaningful way. Specifically, it enabled military leaders to counter the increased complexity of leadership in asymmetric operations with more meaningfulness and reflectiveness. The Danish Army Leader Development Program is a field of training using ‘real people’ and ‘real situations’, where emotional competencies can be trained in a structured way to turn them into real competencies.

Until the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Danish Defense was primarily trained in conducting symmetric¹ military operations. With the change of Danish foreign politics and subsequent participation in international operations, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, the patterns of operations changed dramatically. Suddenly, the Danish Defense needed to be transformed to a more expeditionary force capable of conducting asymmetric operations in different cultural, social and political contexts, far from Denmark. This created the demand for a new situational awareness as well as a need for a different type of leadership – a process that would take time. As tactics, doctrines, technologies and procedures were developed and changed, the approach to leadership also needed to be developed. Suddenly the challenges faced during operations were not only Improvised Explosive Devices, ambushes, shootings and loss to families. Also leadership challenges in military staffs and units emerged, which in many cases acted, controlled, and commanded based on a mindset of linear and symmetric thinking with great emphasis on analysis of primarily cause and effect.

1 Symmetric warfare is ‘traditional and conventional’ warfare, in the sense that battles are fought between two comparable forces.

Now the Danish Army has more than ten years of experience working with military leaders and emotional intelligence. Often, army leaders must work under great pressure: if necessary, they must take the life of others and risk their own lives in order to achieve specific goals. In a foreign country with a different culture based on other values and ethics than your own, it can be difficult to mobilize meaning – especially in dangerous situations where your own life and your followers' lives are at risk. An important part of the leader development program is to work with the leaders' emotional intelligence in a relational context, thereby creating a common language and shared concepts between army leaders and their soldiers. The empiricism consists of first lieutenants during their one year Advanced Officers' Course. During about 5000 coaching hours in the last 10 years, almost 1000 officers have participated in the Leader Development Program. Completing the course, the students are promoted to army captains.

2 Theory: Views on the Role of Emotional Intelligence and Sensemaking

Some theorists (Ekman 1973; Dyer 1993; Mayer et al 2002) will argue that emotions and emotional intelligence is a basic part of the human psyche and operates in the areas of classical theory of intelligence, personality psychology and theory of emotions. Knowing the way one functions is essential to understanding how one relates to others – and thereby an integrated part of effective team development and leadership. Emotional intelligence makes it possible to think and plan by considering and integrating emotions into our decisions. Leading experts (e.g. Caruso & Salovey, 2004) within emotion research agree that emotional intelligence is a crucial element in effective leadership. Current theories (e.g. Stacey, 2015) of leadership or descriptions of trusted leaders show that emotional competencies – and 'doing the right thing' – may play at least as important a role as technical competencies and industry knowledge, and perhaps even more so. Nevertheless, why focus on emotional intelligence in a military organization? Mayer (2002) argued that

people have a congenital capacity for emotional skills, where others like Lutz (1988) argued that particular cultural systems, social and material environments will inevitably structure emotional meaning, and claimed that emotional experience is predominantly cultural. Among other things, the experience taken on board during emotional problem solving often determines the extent to which emotional capacity is developed into intrinsic skills. Research by Damasio (2003) has shown that human beings cannot make any cognitive decisions without also processing emotional information that incorporates how we feel about a particular situation. Emotions can be changed, constructed and developed, they are functional and they support rational and cognitive thinking, which is a substantial part of a military leader's job in operational planning and decision processes. It is imperative that the military leader conducts his or her leadership standing on two feet, so to speak, as illustrated in Figure 1. Therefore, focusing on emotional intelligence is a very meaningful exercise, especially for military leaders.



Figure 1: The importance of the modern military leader standing solid on two feet based on emotional and cognitive intelligence and competences.

Indeed, emotional intelligence and emotional and social sense have been positively correlated to relational and organizational competencies. Moreover, emotional and social intelligence have been found to be as important as cognitive or analytical intelligence (Stein & Howard, 2006). Effective leaders use their emotions to liberate the energy of others, but this requires one to know one's emotions. This has pointed to the importance of early awareness of emotions to better enable action. In other words, the rate that emotions are translated into feelings will determine the rate at which emotional 'data' can be used, and thereby how quickly one can act or decide on things based on those emotions. If the leader does not have the necessary competencies to identify, utilize, understand and handle emotions, this can subsequently influence the relations within the organization. Handling feelings and regulating emotions is not about repression of feelings or rationalizing of feelings. In fact, the ability to handle feelings effectively implies consciousness, acceptance and use of feelings in decision-making and problem solving – an important fact that leaders need to understand. It is important to work with the concrete feeling at the specific time and thereby avoid reacting without thinking, and instead reflect, postpone or moderate the expression of the feeling, so it is used appropriately and optimally to make decisions.

3 Theory: Leadership as a Complex Multilevel System

From an individual psychological perspective, the relation is secondary unless we are capable of being curious about several meanings created within any one context. A 'truth for everybody' does not exist but instead a 'truth for the community' (Gergen & Gergen, 2004). This offers the possibility to explore the truths within the community and to try to align our own 'truths' with them. On that basis we learn to act wisely on the emotions that emerge based on 'the truths' paradoxes and dilemmas (Quinn et al, 2011). In a social constructionism view (Gergen & Gergen, 2004), emotions can be seen as both-and, where the positive and negative consequences of each approach

can be examined from different perspectives. In this light, emotional intelligence is not seen as a truth but as a language helping us to create a desirable future for the organization. The language creates the reality. Employees need to know what they do and why, which results in the leader often being in the frontline (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2011). In other words, it is about giving meaning to what happens – on the one hand it is about communicating an assignment clearly and on the other hand, to create what Weick refers to as ‘retrospective sensemaking’. Retrospective sensemaking is when the mature leader knows that what he or she has communicated often has an unintentional meaning when it is understood by the employee. At that point, the leader will open him/herself up to the response or reaction given by the employee after a certain communication, and act from that. Emotional intelligence is a competence to understand the response and consequently act wisely. In this, it is not a necessity to understand the whole in order to act, but on the foundation of one’s own local understanding, which encompasses perceptions and feelings (Stacey, 2007). Using the metaphor of jazz improvisation, Barrett (1998) suggests that we appreciate the interactive complexity and pay attention to the emotional connections between organizational members, which will inspire deeper levels of involvement and committed participation. In our view and understanding, the notation of emotional intelligence is best used as a dialogical tool combining the two paradigms in practice.

Leading in the most extreme military context – war – is unique. During combat operations soldiers might get in contact with core values or identities, and core emotions. If such ‘core things’ exist, it might be more likely to appear in these contexts rather than in other ‘no high extreme’ environments. But having a broad experience from physically and mentally challenging exercises as well as conducting military operations in war zones abroad, it is our experience that an approach based solely on individual psychology is not enough. But with the supplement and combination of e.g. social constructionist and existentialistic views, military leaders and soldiers are able to make better sense in these extreme contexts with e.g.

very little sleep, hostilities, facing death yourself, wounded and dead colleagues, extreme weather conditions, etc. Therefore, it is very meaningful to approach leader development from more than one perspective, and in our perspective military leadership cannot be understood from only an individual psychology or relational perspective – the military context is far too complex for that. As Hannah et al. (2010:161) write: ‘... *leadership is a complex and multilevel dynamic system of which any specific leader is only part, requiring various aspects of this system to be assessed to understand the causations and contingencies that different parts of the system impose on leadership processes*’.

4 Practical Method

In the leader development program, we use real situations and real people. All officers (students) have experience from missions around the world and our courses are designed in a way that makes it possible to merge theory and practices. As an add-on to this, we offer a military personal coach throughout the entire course. In many situations, a personal coach with a military background has a good understanding of the personal and organizational challenges facing the officer, and he or she will be able to offer questions from other and sometimes more provocative perspectives and thereby invite the officer to take more reflective and conscious decisions.

Before attending the course, the officer takes a 360-degree emotional intelligence test (EQ360). During the first weeks of the course, the personal coach and the officer have a one-on-one coaching dialogue in order to give him or her a platform from which it is possible to explore and perhaps adjust his or her personal leadership. The more detailed schematics are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

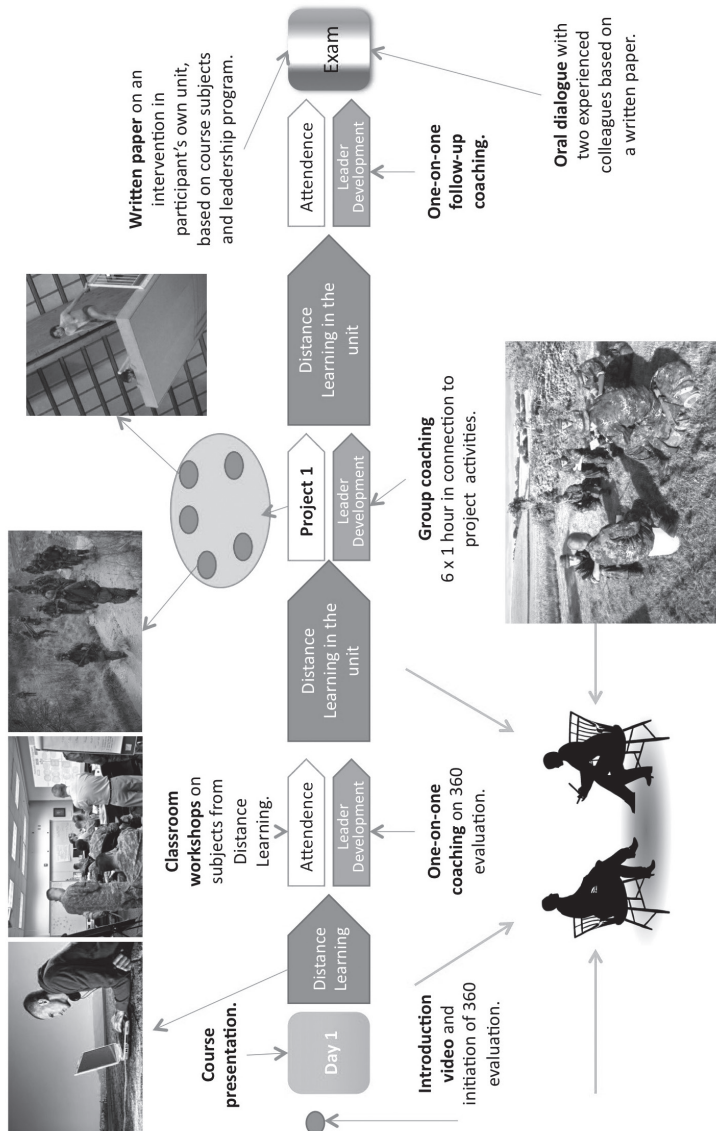


Figure 2: Schematic and detailed overview of the Leader Development Program at the Royal Danish Army Officers' Academy.

The EQ360 works as a tool for dialogue in different contexts. On one hand the officer returns to his daytime job in e.g. the infantry company to explore the validity of what the test indicated, and at the same time the officer uses his or her peers at the course for inspiration and development of competencies of his or her choice. This is possible because the course is designed as blended learning, where learning is achieved at different locations in different contexts – in this case operational, classroom and one-on-one coaching dialogues.

These courses are used to mentally prepare the officer for his or her next position in the organization, and the focus in the coaching dialogues is future challenges or other situations which have a strong presence in the mind of the officer.

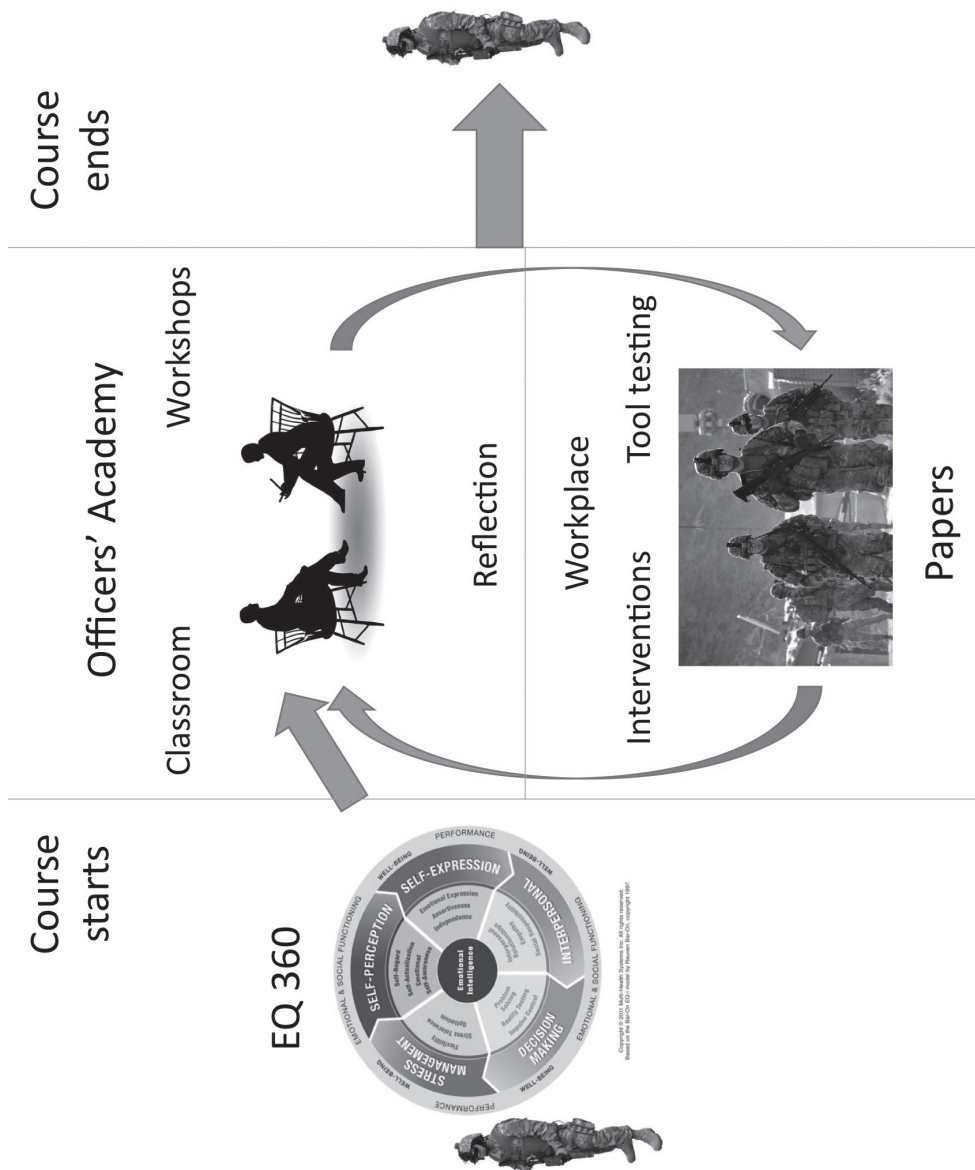


Figure 3: General overview of the Leader Development Program at the Royal Danish Army Officers' Academy.

5 Academic Method

A quantitative research study was made on the Internet using monkey-survey, which is an online survey development cloud-based software. Former students (n=38) from RDAOA who had participated in the one-year-long leader development program were asked to think back and reflect on the effects of the coaching dialogues based on emotional intelligence. They were given questions in a four-answer possibilities scale and to qualitative vary these findings further, a few semi-structured interviews were conducted.

6 Results

According to the officers' own reflections, the dialogues had a good impact. To the question: *'To what degree have you experienced that the leader development course at the Officers' Academy has had a positive influence/meaning for your leadership competences?'* 86% indicated 'To a very high degree' or 'To a high degree'.

A significant finding was that 98% of the officers indicated that the officer's ability to understand, communicate and handle emotions is an imperative competence in being a successful military leader (*'To what degree do you evaluate that feelings and your ability to understand, communicate and manage your feelings, are an important factor in relation to your success as a leader?'*). For the layman this finding may be quite unique as – at any rate in Denmark – many people have the notion that military leadership is still old-school authoritarian leadership.

In some cases, the officer's self-image had to be adjusted as the following quote indicates. The officer will have to reflect about his or her leadership and decide whether or not he or she will try to develop his or her leadership competences, which can be a hard and time-consuming process.

“...I remember that I was surprised at the result, which was vastly different to my own self-perception. But I could definitely recognize the described traits after some reflection...”

Introducing a new program like this is not without complications. In many cases this new leader development program creates more reflective and relational-oriented leaders, who are curious and challenging about their own and others' leadership. When meeting e.g. higher-ranking officers trained in another era based on a different approach to leadership, they can get frustrated not being able to discuss leadership in a common language and with approximately the same approach to leadership, reflection, dialogues, etc. Some will even talk about a layer between the new officers and the old officers and the different ways of thinking about leadership, as this interesting quote indicates:

“...I have experienced that I could talk the same language as my fellow colleagues who had graduated from the Officers' Academy in the same period as me. But particularly leaders and colleagues who had been a bit longer in the system could probably have benefitted from such a leader development process...”

It is our observation that being a competent dialogical person, where you are able to have focus in different dialogues, be present in yourself and in other relations, will make you a more including and broadly accepted leader, which consequently gives you the possibility to create better results. As Barge (2014) argues: *“pivotal leadership ... characterize(s) the complexity of simultaneously being caught up in multiple conversations and working with ... colleagues to shape them in productive ways. ... Pivotal leadership involve(s) (1) an ability to turn quickly from one conversation to another, to change course and direction rapidly from within the flow of activity while constantly moving and (2) an ability to be simultaneously at the center and the periphery of activity.”*

7 Authors' Retrospective Reflections

The freedom to choose a personal and relevant context, which could be a past situation as well as a possible future situation, creates an essential motivation for the officer. It gives a sense of immediate value to what could lead to success as a leader. Before facing the challenges, the officer has already thought through several of the possible scenarios up front, and furthermore has had the chance to reflect with a senior colleague (the coach) and other peers in the same situation.

Theory is used during the course to supplement the personal development process. But the focus is not on theory but on developing reflective competencies. The possibility to try out theoretical approaches on several occasions in the daytime job, while attending the course, leads to a deeper understanding of the theory that the officer chooses to work with, and the officer is allowed to choose 20% of his or her own literature. The evaluations of the leader development program show that the one-on-one coaching dialogue has the most potential for developing the officer. In a busy everyday life, it seems difficult for the officer to relate theory to practice and to develop his or her own personal leadership. Individual coaching helps to merge these three elements (practice, theory and personal leadership) and moves learning from traditional cognitive skills to emotional personal competencies.

If a program like this is going to be successful, it is in our view imperative that the coach has a humble and multi-perspective approach to leader development. If that is not the case, the coach might 'guide' the officer in an inappropriate way leading only to homosocial reproduction (Rivera, 2013), which is an actual possibility in an organization like the military that in many ways can be seen as a relatively closed and self-producing system. Instead, it is about inviting the officer to be curious about his or her own behavior and how it influences not only him or herself but also the surroundings and thereby co-creates a shared reality. The growing awareness of his or her own behavior and different discourses improves the relational orientation.

Therefore, it is also very important that the subject or situation is realistic and relevant and perhaps even ongoing. In this way, the officer is learning in the very context he or she is a part of.

8 Conclusion

This article tried to tie in with this issue's theme of 'Flow Beyond Systems: Development Through Somatic Intelligence' by showing how emotional intelligence can create meaning at different levels. At the micro level, it alerts us to engaging employees in work to maximize human potential and, at the macro level, it turns attention to e.g. organizational identity, culture, reputation, legitimacy and character. Working with emotional intelligence is a useful part of the development of leadership founded on paradoxes and dilemmas in the leaders' contexts (Quinn et al, 2011).

The notion of working with individuals using psychological testing tools (e.g. the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) or EQ360) as a foundation for dialogue, and exploring the 'findings' in a relational context has been pivotal in this leader development program of advancing the leaders' agility to meet the demands of the world's complex contexts. The article has demonstrated how this organizational development endeavor has changed a classical bureaucratic organization and its professional life orders. The EQ-i and the Danish Army Leader Development Program bridge the theory on emotions and emotional intelligence, and the ability to navigate in complex and continuously changing organizations.

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- Creative scientific publishing & reading between and beyond theory and practice
- COS LinkedIn Virtual Community
- And more ...

The Friend&Membership fee is €200,- + 20% VAT for 18 months. Why 18 months? We synchronize the Friend&Membership cycle with the COS-conference rhythm and 3 COS journal editions.

Your 18 month COS Friend & Membership includes:

- 2 editions of the COS-journal: 2 issues, 2 copies each issue – one for you and one for a friend of yours = 4 hard copies, 2 issues for the value of € 112.-
- Conference fee discount of € 150.-
- COS-Creations: Special discount of 25 % for one seminar of your choice each year

Send your application for membership to office@cos-collective.com

Join COS, a Home for Reflective Hybrids

The future is an unknown garment that invites us to weave our lives into it. How these garments will fit, cover, colour, connect and suit us lies in our (collective) hands. Many garments from the past have become too tight, too grey, too something...and the call for new shapes and textures is acknowledged by many. Yet changing clothes leaves one naked, half dressed in between. Let's connect in this creative, vulnerable space and cut, weave and stitch together.

Our target group is reflective hybrids – leaders, scientists, consultants, and researchers from all over the world who dare to be and act complex. Multi-layered topics require multidimensional approaches that are, on the one hand, interdisciplinary and, on the other hand, linked to theory and practice, making the various truths and perspectives mutually useful.

If you feel you are a reflective hybrid you are very welcome to join our COS movement, for instance by:

- Visiting our website: www.cos-collective.com
- Getting in touch with COS-Creations. A space for personal & collective development, transformation and learning. Visit our website: www.cos-collective.com
- Following our COS-Conference online: www.cos-collective.com
- Subscribing to our newsletter: see www.cos-collective.com
- Subscribing to the COS Journal: see www.cos-collective.com
- Ordering single articles from the COS Journal: www.cos-collective.com
- Becoming a member of our LinkedIn group: go to www.linkedin.com and type in "Challenging Organisations and Society,reflective hybrids" or contact Tonnie van der Zouwen: office@cos-collective.com

SAVE THE DATE
4th COS Conference
19. – 21. September 2019
in Venice, Italy

The Journal with Impact

The Journal “Challenging Organisations and Society . reflective hybrids® (COS)” is the first journal to be dedicated to the rapidly growing requirements of reflective hybrids in our complex 21st-century organisations and society. Its international and multidisciplinary approaches balance theory and practice and show a wide range of perspectives in and between organisations and society. Being global and diverse in thinking and acting outside the box are the targets for its authors and readers in management, consulting and science.