Quality improvement coaching in healthcare: A Swedish case study of how improvement coaches approach learning in contemporary healthcare systems
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Background
Previous research has shown that coaching is a cost effective and an efficacious way to facilitate healthcare quality improvement. This study follows up on these findings by exploring how coaching is realized in terms of learning: What kind of learning ideals pervade quality improvement coaching, and how is learning support realized given the prevailing conditions in a contemporary healthcare systems?

Aim
The aim was to identify discursive patterns of how coaches guide learning in quality improvement practices, and, explain these discursive patterns as they relate to basic quality improvement ideas and the prevailing conditions of the healthcare system.

Research design
For the purpose of the study, a group of coaches exchanged their experiences of their pedagogic roles and the strategies that they employ, on four occasions, over a period of four months. The conversations were filmed and then analyzed, using critical discourse analysis as an analytic framework.

Findings
Three discursive patterns were identified: (i) a ‘management discourse’, (ii) a ‘professional discourse’, and (iii) a ‘disguised discourse’. The management discourse is mainly influenced by outcome goals where the coaches direct the staff forward to reach a behavioral change. The professional discourse is influenced by long-term goals where the coaches empower the staff to take over and run their own improvements. Finally, the disguised discourse is influenced by the resistance the coaches meet in practice. The coaches adjust to existing structures, disguise their quality improvement mission, but still with the aim to eventually dismantle dysfunctional structures.

Conclusion and practical implications
The study illuminates how three predominant ways of building a learning organization is present in practice without a clear awareness from the coaches. The findings of the study offer a basis for future professional discussion among quality improvement coaches where learning is not taken for granted, but preferably, conditions for learning is critically clarified in the light of existing circumstances.