Feedback
is the core of
effective PCP coaching

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Every book or paper on coaching also deals with feedback. Feedback is in fact the core of effective coaching, but of course, there are various forms of coaching and also various goals that can be achieved through coaching. For example, coaching to change your own behaviour, coaching to exercise better, coaching to lose weight, etc. and coaching to learn.

Almost all forms of coaching are based on feedback. Coaching for learning is no different, but we can use various forms of feedback to shape the coaching. As far as we are concerned, this also ties in with the principles of power-oriented coaching (Korthagen & Nuijten, 2020): tapping into the power of the coachee strengths, teaching the coachee to become autonomous and self-directing, and creating depth by embedding in authentic contact. Within that framework, when coaching learning projects for example, both content- and process-oriented coaching will be necessary at team level as well as individual level and it is good to coach in a monitoring way so that there is a good progress/development and strong in-depth learning.

We stick to a clear concept that we formerly called 'VIP coaching' in Dutch. The VIP (very important person) in this process is the learner. We start from that perspective. Not from so-called right answers and corrective feedback.
VIP in Dutch stands for 'Voortgang, Inhoud and Proces'. In English, we could translate that into 'Progress, Content and Process' (PCP).
VIP-coaching offers a helping hand to every learning coach to keep focusing on the core elements of coaching: Aiming for progress or growth (P), deepening and understanding the content (C) and reaching optimal work processes (P). These three aspects run continuously in a dialogue in which connection is continuously strengthened. And this is partly achieved by sharing feed up, feedback and feed forward.

PCP- Coaching: Content-oriented and process-oriented feedback - How do you get to the content?

A coach enters into a feedback dialogue and knows how to maintain a good partnership with the learner. The feedback on the agenda is balanced between content-oriented feedback and process-oriented feedback. Content-oriented feedback concerns quality aspects of the content of the learning activity (task, assignment, project challenge). Process-oriented feedback focuses on facilitating the learning process in order to successfully complete the learning activity. Process-oriented coaching is thus reflecting together on steps taken in the individual process and in the team process.

Table 1 contains sample questions that can guide the process-oriented feedback dialogue between the coach and learners.

Table 1: Example questions for the **process-oriented feedback dialogue** between coach and learners

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Process-oriented coaching of the individual learner:

- How are you doing with your subtask?
- Where do you stand?
- How do you feel?
- What would you describe as the most important moment?
- What motivates you to continue like this?
- What went well? What was hard? Where did you struggle?
- How do you deal with such a problem?
- Why?
- How do you want to tackle it?
- Do you need anything else to deal with it quickly?

Process-oriented coaching of teams:

- How is the cooperation going?
- Is it efficient to work with each other?
- How do you experience the cooperation?
- How do you deal with setbacks?
- How do you motivate yourself to continue?
- What are the top moments in the teamwork?
- How do you make teamwork a pleasant experience?
- What could be better? What would you like to change and why?
- How are we going to do that?
- What tasks do we expect to do for next week?
- Who will take on what?

Content-oriented coaching provides depth and understanding. Content-oriented coaching is done by asking in-depth and understanding questions; solution-oriented questions; application in new situations; analysis; summarising/synthesising; explaining/clarifying; schematising and this also at the individual and team level. Also here is the rule applied use whiteboards as much as possible! And let learners continuously question each other and add questions as a coach.
Many training programmes install sessions such as 'knowledge sharing sessions', 'learning dialogues' or 'learning communities', where students organize themselves in slightly larger groups (20 to 30 people) weekly meetings (up to 10 hours a week) and plan the activities during these group sessions (where coaches also participate as partners). The activities during these sessions then vary strongly from external experts explaining concepts or theory or illustrating practice to students presenting what they read, dyads presenting an application of a theory, trios explaining how they calculated an assignment, coaches/teachers invited to give a specific lecture on an topic that the majority finds hard to understand, a business manager explaining his daily practice, a scientist showing recent scientific findings, a book author explaining the core of his book, and certainly meetings to discuss issues flavoured by watching YouTube videos on the subject and reflecting on how to progress. And do not worry, students themselves decide what is needed and what is planned. Coaches are partners.

As a coach, while coaching teams or individuals, you also fulfill a model function for asking constructively critical questions. The example questions are: Can you sketch that model? Can you draw the differences between … and … ? Can you sketch your timeline? Can you summarise that on the whiteboard? etc.

The more often you as a coach ask to sketch content on a whiteboard, the more learners will prepare themselves and the more depth the meetings will gain. Make sure it is as non-threatening as possible, let others add to it, let them build something as a team, i.e. co-construct it themselves, add something themselves, etc.
As a coach, do yourself a favour: at each meeting, ask several learners to explain the content to the others on the whiteboard; after a few weeks, everyone will show up well-prepared.
Table 2 provides examples of content-oriented learning activities or questions that the coach encourages the learners to engage in.

Table 2: The examples of **content-oriented learning questions** the coach encourages the learners (individual, team) to engage in

- Can you summarise this?
- Could you outline this on the whiteboard/smartboard?
- Who could outline the solution route?
- Can you outline the plan of the approach?
- Could you please do also summarise this?
- Could everyone give his reflections on this?
- Who can summarise this on the whiteboard?
- Can you express your own vision on a subject?
- Can you formulate new questions that you ask yourself?
- Can you draw these in an action plan?
- Could you compare these data? These models? These solution routes? Pros and cons?
- Can you give your arguments and propose options based on that?
- Can you substantiate partial solutions?
- Could you please summarise again?
- Can you conclude what each of us will take up/ study by the next meeting?

Progress or growth-oriented coaching

Learning is not always a pleasure. Sometimes it is hard work, most of the time. However, it is working on something that is challenging, which you are interested in, which you choose to learn more about or which you can do better. Good coaching is also 'demanding coaching in consultation'. This is achieved through the continual questioning of the content on the one hand and through the frequent cyclical nature of feedback dialogues on the other. In this feedback dialogue, the feed forward step takes an important place; it supports the learner to learn from feedback and thus grow.
Growth-oriented coaching starts with re-establishing the connection. ‘Connection’ consists of mutual understanding, respect and attunement. It is the strengthening of the bond of trust that is necessary for learning. After all, learning is not possible in a situation of fear and distrust. Maintaining the connection is therefore a priority during the entire feedback dialogue.
Growth-oriented coaching means encouraging the learner to explicitly and urposefully take all steps in the feedback process in a dialogical manner. Specifically, in order to stimulate deep learning, the feedback that has been cognitively and affectively processed by the learner is part of an action plan that the learner creates. This action plan stimulates and facilitates that the feedback is concretely put to work. The follow-up activities, in turn, are the input for new learning objectives set by the learner and thus the first step of a new feedback dialogue. Therefore, the action plan is an important tool in the feed forward step

and as an input for the new feed up phase. As a coach, we stimulate the learner to use the action plan in this way, we stimulate planning, working step by step, dealing consciously with timing.
Making the feed forward step explicit under the guidance of the coach not only increases the acceptance of using feedback dialogues, but also makes the usefulnessmore understandable , clarifies its usefulness, and all these lead to positive emotions (affective reactions) during the learning process. This in turn leads to more depth, stronger integration and a feeling of flow. You want more, now that things are going so well you want to continue, you feel that you are on the track of a solution, your teammates explain new facts, concepts, relationships, structures, methods, etc.

Table 3: The example questions for **Progress or Growth coaching**

- How does your action plan look like?
- What are your next steps?
- When do you think you will have completed the next step?
- When can we review action 2 and 3 together?
- How much time do you need for the next part?
- Do you need anything else to finish by Tuesday?
- What are you going to get ready for next week?
- What will we discuss next week?
- How does your planning look like?
- Are we on schedule?
- Who makes the adjustments to the planning?
- How will this contribute to your planned learning outcome?
- How do you see those actions being realised?
- Is it clear how we will proceed?

Conditions for successful coaching

Of course, there are also certain conditions to ensure successful coaching (Dochy, Gijbels, Segers & Van den Bossche, 2022):

1. A qualified coach or certified HILL coach.
2. PCP Coaching is supported and encouraged by the management; training opportunities are provided.
3. PCP Coaching is integrated into the learner's learning process.
4. After a period of coaching, it will be checked whether both the personal goals set by the learner and the learning results set by the organisation have been achieved.
5. Sufficient time for coaching, preferably on a weekly or biweekly basis. This also increases the learner's motivation to participate in the coaching process (Knight, 2009).

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