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# TOOLKIT COACHING

# COLOPHON

The full toolkit is available in Dutch and in English. Interested in using the toolkit? We are happy to help you tailor the toolkit to your education. Please contact the Educational Design & Technology team by sending an email to [marijke.kok@ru.nl](mailto:marijke.kok@ru.nl)

## Toolkit Coaching

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Concept and texts: Gert Bosgra, Marijke Kok, Nikki Verseput, Michelle Veugelers

Illustrations and design: Gert Bosgra

Translation: Joost Poort, Poort Language Service

Special thanks to: Jos in den Bosch, Camila van Ham, Mariska Kleemans

Contact: [edt@ru.nl](mailto:edt@ru.nl)

Radboud University



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# TOOLKIT COACHING

## INTRODUCTION FOR INSTRUCTORS

In the think tank, students conduct research on a specific social issue in interdisciplinary groups. The students work independently, carrying the responsibility for the group process and communication with their client. Your task as an instructor is to guide them, alternating between the role of expert and coach. Which can be a bit of a balancing act. Students often expect their instructors to have 'the right answer', and sometimes find it difficult to work constructively on solutions without help. Moreover, they do not always realise the influence they themselves have on situations, and on how to change them. This toolkit contains methods and approaches that will enhance the students' self-managing and problem-solving skills. In terms of collaboration, project management and decision-making, as well as personal efficacy and dealing with setbacks. These methods and approaches can be applied by you, the instructor, while guiding the students, but also by the students themselves.

This introduction offers a brief description of a number of basic principles and offers tools that will help instructors define their coaching role. These principles and tools are based on models from literature and their application in coaching practice.

Approaching students in a coaching manner is different than working from the role of expert, where the instructor directs the students. When coaching students, you let them take the lead. The students own their project, their behaviour and its effects, goal-setting, decision-making, setting of priorities, and the inclusion of reflection and evaluation moments. By giving the students ownership, you let them know that you have faith in their competence, which in turn makes them feel confident about their skills. In practice this means that, as an instructor, you:

1. offer frameworks;
2. ask questions;
3. reinforce the things that work;
4. do not advise;
5. stimulate evaluation and reflection;
6. create a safe learning environment;
7. learn from each other.

These basic principles are explained in more detail below. Each principle comes with various tools and examples of questions that offer support in all the situations you will encounter as an instructor guiding students.

### 1. Offer frameworks

To give students the safety they need to take ownership, the instructor offers frameworks for both process and content.

For the process, you specify:

- The number of contact moments. At the start of the project, and in consultation with the students, decide on the number of meetings and the length of those meetings. Schedule an initial meeting during which both you and the students can express your mutual expectations, and schedule evaluation moments. Make a planning that includes these meetings.
- The form of contact. Decide how and where your contact moments will take place (meetings, email, learning environment).
- Your expectations. Be clear about your role and approach, and ask students what they, within those limits, need, find important, and expect of you. Do this in a questioning and exploratory way that resonates with the team. Also indicate what you expect of the students. Make your expectations concrete by turning them into actions. Mutual expectations and needs may change over time. It is therefore important to check them regularly and, if necessary, realign them.

#### Examples of questions that will help you offer frameworks for the process:

*When will this process/meeting/product be a success to you? Why is that important to you? What will you do to make it pleasant and useful? What aspects should definitely be addressed?*

#### Examples of questions that will help you formulate expectations:

*What do we see if we keep to these expectations? What do we do? What arrangements do we make? What do we need to be able to stick to those arrangements? What do you need from me? How can I support you? What do you expect from me? What are your main expectations? Why? How will you establish and maintain a professional relationship with your client?*

To guide students with regard to content, ask them about their plans and about how they will turn those plans into concrete actions. Together, discover what steps in the right direction are achievable.

Sometimes students dread conducting an interview or giving a presentation. By making it small and looking at the next step in the preparation process, you help them take responsibility for these tasks, instead of putting them off.

**Examples of questions that will help you offer frameworks for the content:**

*I hear you define two subjects. Which subject would you like to focus on first? What will you be doing today or this week? What does your planning for the coming period look like?*

You may feel you do not have enough insight into the teams' issues with regard to content. If so, at the end of the contact moment, ask the students to send you a short email, stating what they took away from your meeting. This is a quick way to get a view on what is going on and what is important.

Lastly, be mild if students do not follow the path they set for themselves or for the team. This is part of the learning process. Give them space to experiment and to discover what works as they go along, for instance by allowing them to adjust their goals halfway through the project.

## 2. Asking questions

By asking questions, you stimulate students to find answers, make choices, find solutions and plot their course independently. Ask open questions, which allow students to tell their full story, prevent you from making wrong assumptions, and show students that you are interested and involved. You help students get a clearer view on situations, so they can make them concrete. Moreover, you stimulate them to gain new insights, and create movement. (Dijkstra & Rondeel, 2019).

Although it seems an obvious thing to do, asking open questions is not always easy. Instructors watching recordings of themselves during training sessions often notice that, even though they were convinced that they were asking mostly open questions, the footage proves otherwise. You may find it helpful to make a conscious effort to practice this.

The fact that being in a coaching role involves asking a lot of questions, does not mean that you are not allowed to give feedback. In fact, direct feedback ('I hear you sigh' or 'we agreed that you would send me your planning today, but I haven't received it') can actually help start a conversation about the students' direction over their project. Also, early in the learning process, self-assessments by students are not

always adequate. (Cornford, 2010). In this phase, students need the frame of reference offered by the coach, from time to time.

**Examples of open questions:**

- **Scientific foundation.** *What theoretical concepts suit your research? How will you apply this knowledge in actual practice?*
- **Goal and planning.** *What do you see as the desired situation? What can you do to get from the current situation to the desired one? What intermediate steps can you take, in what time phases? What do you want to achieve?*
- **Feasibility.** *Is what you are trying to do achievable? What obstacles do you expect to encounter and how will you overcome them?*
- **Context.** *What context is there for you to consider? Who is involved? What do they do?*
- **Communication.** *How will communication with the client take place? How will you keep the client updated on your progress?*
- **Considerations.** *What options do you have? Which of these options appeal to you most? What results will this option yield? What advantages does this approach have, compared to the others?*

**Examples of further questions:**

*Could you give me an example of that? So if I understand you correctly, (...). Is that right? How often will you do that? Tell me? (Or use filmmaker Frans Bromet's method: repeating someone's last words or sentence, making them sound like a question.)*

## 3. Reinforce the things that work

By focussing on what is going well in the teams, you boost the team members' motivation and reinforce good qualities and development. (Bannink, 2016). Ask students to share interesting plans and successes, no matter how small. By doing so, you emphasise what works in actual practice, and create an opportunity to give positive feedback, and so stimulate further development and growth.

Regularly indicate what you appreciate about the students and about their approach. When giving positive feedback, name the points you truly appreciate. Do not just give feedback on the task or the (interim) results, but also provide feedback on the process. This is most effective when done in the here and now, meaning the moments when you see, read or hear it happen (Korthagen & Nuijten, 2015; Dijkstra & Rondeel, 2019). Then ask students how they can hold on to this and further develop it, to be even more successful. Make an effort to always be specific when doing this. A simple 'well done' is much less of a compliment than 'you have found a great, innovative solution using the "what if" approach'.

**Examples of reactions to give positive feedback in the here and now:**

*It is good to see that big smile. What are you so happy about? When you talked about (...) your voice went calmer. How did you experience that? I seem to hear / see a certain (...), is that correct?*

**Examples of questions to reinforce things that work:**

*What have you achieved already? Can you identify moments when things (do) go well? What is different about them? What do you do differently at those moments? What result does this yield? What are the success factors within your project?*

**Examples of questions to make a situation explicit and further develop it (Bannink, 2016):**

*What was it that made this moment successful? How did you think of this good idea? How did you manage to carry it out? What result did it yield? What strengths did you use at the time? How can you apply those strengths at other times? How will you celebrate this success?*

#### **4. Do not advise**

Despite what you have agreed on regarding your role, students will sometimes want you to advise them or give them the right answer. When acting as coach, you do not offer advice, but you ask questions, summarise or define what you see. This increases the students' ownership and helps them find the answer themselves.

There may be specific moments when you might choose to switch to the role of expert and, for instance, give the entire group some more insight into project management. In that case, always state explicitly that you are switching roles. If you do not, it might muddle your mutual expectations and the agreements you made.

**Examples of questions to help students come up with solutions/ directions themselves:**

*How would you handle this situation adequately? Given this situation, what could you do? When did things go well? What did you do that time? What are the effects of your behaviour in this situation?*

**Examples of questions to stimulate ownership:**

*Where in the process are you? What is your main focus at this time? What has consultation between the team members led to, so far? How do you want to proceed? If I give you my answer, how will that contribute to your development? What would be a reason for you to actively participate in this project?*

#### **5. Stimulate evaluation and reflection**

Evaluation and reflection promote learning. It is a shame if students only evaluate and reflect at the end of the project. That way, they miss valuable insights and may, for instance, stick to an unrealistic planning. Support the students by regularly evaluating and reflecting with them. State explicitly what you are evaluating or reflecting on. If the students have a tendency to focus mainly on the product, stimulate evaluation and reflection on the process. The questions below may help you do that. Do not forget to also give feedback on what you hear and see the students do. This can also stimulate reflection.

**Examples of questions you can ask to help students evaluate the product:**

*What are you proud of? What results did you aim for? What are the actual results? What is the difference? What is already there, that you can use or develop further? What needs to still be done before you are satisfied with the result? What makes the result useful and worthwhile? What effects does the result have (so far)?*

**Examples of questions to stimulate evaluation of the process:**

- **Work arrangement.** *How did everyone contribute to reaching this result? How did you come to this work arrangement? What influence did your actions have on the collaboration process? What behaviour would you like to see more of, and from who? What do you need to perform (even) better from now on?*
- **Planning.** *To what extent are you sticking to the planning? What is the best way to proceed now?*
- **Learning process.** *How will you monitor your own learning process in the following weeks? What reactions or feedback did you get? How did this influence collaboration with others? What feedback can you take from that, for your further development?*
- **Collaboration.** *How did collaborating with external parties go? To what extent did you show your knowledge, experience and competences within that collaboration? Were the right people and parties involved in the project at the right time?*

**Examples of questions to stimulate reflection:**

- **Things you see or hear.** *I seem to hear / see a certain (...), is that correct? What do you realise about yourself in this situation? I see you smile while you tell me that you find it hard. What happens at that moment? I hear you sigh. What does that sigh mean?*
- **Team goals.** *How did you deal with setbacks, and what have you learned from that? What are the most important things you have learned from this project (so far)? What were important steps in your learning process?*

- **Personal learning goals.** *What would you like to do again in a future situation? Why? How would you do that? What would you do differently? Why? How would you go about it? What do you need to maintain what you have achieved? What actions does that involve?*

## 6. Creating a safe learning environment

A safe learning environment may seem to be a given. Yet it can be difficult to create safety in certain groups, especially in a project setting that is new to some of the students. To stimulate a climate of safety, you can do the following things:

- Emphasise what there is to be learned (instead of achieved) as a group, and explain that there can be setbacks. Challenge students to think that failing is not the falling down itself, but the not getting back up. They are allowed to make mistakes. What matters is how they deal with those mistakes. Also show them your own fallibility.
- If the group experiences setbacks, take the time to talk with them and ask them about the difficulties they have encountered. Avoid an extensive search for causes. Focus on the now and the future. Focus on what is good and what works or has worked in the preceding period.
- Show the students that you take their contributions seriously. You can let them know that you hear what they are saying by using small interventions. For instance by nodding, but also by asking questions and paraphrasing. By doing this, you show interest, acceptance and understanding. It is also a way of showing the students what you think the essence of their story is, and it allows you to check if this is correct (Lang & van der Molen, 2012).

### Examples of questions to turn setbacks into development opportunities:

*What do you do to keep yourselves going? How are you coping with everything that is happening and has happened? What has helped before during setbacks, even if only a little bit? How could you apply that in this situation? What is going well, even if only a little bit? How could you amplify that?*

## 7. Learning from each other

Every course is literally a learning environment, both for the students and for you as an instructor. Every team has its own coaching needs. Evaluating your role as coach will give you an idea of the extent to which your method meets the needs of this specific team. In addition, it shows your students that you take them seriously. Ending each talk and meeting with an evaluation of your coaching role also gives you more insight into your own attitude towards your students (Dijkstra & Rondeel, 2019).

It is also important to meet with other instructors, share experiences and offer each other feedback. Learning together increases your chances of making a successful role switch to a coaching attitude towards students (van Assen, 2018).

### Examples of questions to evaluate your coaching role with students:

*How do you experience our contact? What worked well for you and what did not? What could be done (even) better next time? Why is that important to you? What would have to be done to achieve this?*

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# TOOLKIT



# THE FANTASTIC TEAM

'The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.'  
- Aristotle -

What makes a team a dream team?  
Researcher Amy Edmondson and her team explored this question on the basis of literature and comprehensive analyses of teams working at Google. Their project became known as 'Project Aristotle' (which is indeed a reference to that beautiful quote of Aristotle, above).

Their analysis yielded five important characteristics that make dream teams soar:

1. Psychological safety: team members feel safe to take risks and to put themselves in a vulnerable position.
2. Reliability: team members deliver quality work and do this on time.
3. Structure and clarity: team members have clear tasks and goals.
4. Meaning: the work has personal importance to team members.
5. Impact: team members believe their work matters.

The first characteristic in particular turned out to be crucial. That is why, in their follow-up research, Edmondson and her team zoomed in on how to create psychological safety in teams.

But what exactly is this psychological safety? No one wants to seem ignorant, incompetent or pushy, and no one wants to be laughed at. But if you feel like you cannot say or ask everything you want to in a meeting with colleagues, a lot of potentially great ideas will remain unvoiced. And there is

no chance of you inspiring a fellow team member with your half-baked idea or silly question. In teams with high psychological safety, there really are no stupid questions, and everyone seriously considers even the craziest ideas.

Scan the QR code or click on the link to hear Ben Tiggelaar explain what you can do to increase psychological safety ([YouTube](#)).



Ben Tiggelaar - Psychological safety (YouTube)



- 3 In the left column, write down the five characteristics of a dream team.
- 4 In the right column, write down what concrete form each individual characteristic would take in your project. Try to already practice psychological safety here: share any idea that comes to mind, try to develop other team members' ideas instead of dismissing them, let each other finish talking, and make sure everyone gets their turn to speak.

For inspiration, also draw on your own experience with previous, successful collaborations. What made it feel so good, back then? What did you do? What made you feel 100% safe to say anything? How will you set clear tasks and goals? When do you feel that you can make a valuable contribution? What do you need to feel appreciated? Write it all down; deleting things does not happen until the next step.

- 5 Discuss what concrete points in the right column are the most important to you and write them down on a new piece of paper. This is your dream team plan. How will you remind yourselves of this plan while you collaborate on your project?
- 1 Meet (live or online).
  - 2 Take pen and paper or open an online, shared document and make two columns: on the left 'The dream team' and on the right 'Our concrete plan'.

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Based on Edmondson (2018) and Tiggelaar (2019).

# WHAT IF...?

“Close your eyes and think of where you are when you have your best ideas”, Duncan Wardle, former Vice President of Innovation and Creativity at Disney, tells his audience. The answers vary widely: on a bicycle, in the shower, on a mountain, during a run, while I’m walking the dog. But no one says ‘at work’ or ‘sitting at my desk’. Yet according to Wardle, you can be creative at those moments too. As long as you find a way to stimulate your creative brain, you will get in that bicycle mode. ([YouTube](#))

One of Wardle’s favourite tools is the question ‘what if...?’ ‘What if’ helps you think outside the box. First you determine what the most distinctive elements of a situation are by describing the first image that comes to mind. Wardle calls these elements the rules of the situation. By using the ‘what if’ question, you transform those rules by coming up with alternatives.

Imagine: you wonder what university lectures will look like in the future. Describe as many components of the image you see before you when you think of a lecture: a room, rows of students, a lecturer, a screen, a PowerPoint presentation, a 45-minute talk, a 15-minute break. Wardle would now ask you the ‘what if’ question. What if you were not sitting in a room? Where would you be? What if you were not listening to a lecturer? What would you be doing? What if there was no fixed time span? How long would it take?

As always, keep in mind the basic rule of brainstorming: there are no bad ideas. Or as Burnett & Evans (2016) put it: bring on the crazy. Unrealistic and wild ideas get us out of our fixed thinking patterns and can lead to refreshing new insights.

- 1 Select an issue in your project that calls for an unconventional solution. Write it down, for instance on a large sheet of paper or in a shared digital document.
- 2 Underneath, make three columns. In the first column, write down all the elements (the rules) of the image this issue conjures up. Do this as quickly as possible.
- 3 Pick one rule to focus on and ask the ‘what if’ question: what if there were no X? Write this question down in the second column.
- 4 In the third column, write down what that would look like. Let your imagination run free and describe this picture in as much detail and as concretely as possible. Do not dismiss ideas but try to develop them or combine them into new ideas. Lastly, make a selection from all the ideas you have come up with. You could make a personal top three and then decide together which one you feel is the best idea.



Duncan Wardle - *The Theory of Creativity* (YouTube)



Radboud University (2021); CC BY-SA 4.0  
Based on: Brown (2009), Burnett et al. (2016), IDEO (2012) and Wardle (2018).

# LISTEN TO THE MINORITY

It rarely happens that all team members completely agree when a team makes a decision. There are always team members who prefer another option but go along with the others. Because they are afraid to go against the prevailing opinion, or simply because they are in the minority.

This does not always have to be a problem, but making majority decisions does mean that potentially good ideas can be lost. Deviating ideas have the potential to create new insights. That chance is lost when they are quickly dismissed. Moreover, if some of the team members do not feel heard when decisions are made, this can lead to frustration ('They will never accept an idea of mine, I am done putting energy in this project').

How do you appreciate both the voice of the minority and that of the majority without getting bogged down in endless, fruitless debate? That is what Deep Democracy was developed for. This method helps you make decisions that make everyone feel included. To achieve this, you follow four steps:

## 1. Collect all perspectives

The person chairing the meeting opens the discussion by actively and in a neutral manner collecting all ideas, opinions and perspectives the issue raises. Kramer (2018) gives the example of a commune trying to reach a decision about having a pet. Important questions would be: Is anyone allergic? What do we expect from a pet? Who will

take care of the animal? Opinions and points of view are not defended or attacked; this step is only about getting all ideas out in the open.

## 2. Look for the alternative

Resist the urge to immediately reach a decision, and actively look for alternatives. Create a safe atmosphere for every point of view. Give dissenting opinions just as much attention as the majority stance. Do not laugh at ideas that seem strange to you. Do not roll your eyes when someone offers yet another view on the matter. Ask questions like: X has been mentioned several times now, does anyone have a completely different idea? Or: Is there something that has not been mentioned yet? People with a strong opinion can explicitly create room for other points of view by saying something like: My idea is X, but now I would like to hear ideas that are completely different.

## 3. Share the alternative

For each alternative, ask if there are other people who recognise or support it. Joining in is easier than being the first to voice an opposing opinion. When the question of who agrees is asked, it often turns out that a minority opinion is more broadly supported than you initially realised. It is also important to disconnect opinions from the person who voices them. Ask questions like: X has been mentioned? Who can relate to this, even if only a little bit? Can you explain in more detail? Who holds a similar view?

## 4. Vote and include the alternative

In a neutral manner, repeat all of the options mentioned, then vote by show of hands.

- If everyone unanimously agrees on one option, your work is done.
- It is possible that a new point of view is voiced, or that opinions are completely divided. In this case, repeat steps 1 through 3 to ensure that all options are discussed.
- It is also possible that there is a majority preference for one of the options but no unanimity. If so, add the alternative to the option that is supported by the majority. Try to find an optimal version, acknowledge disappointments, ask what someone needs to go along with the majority option and vote again. Continue to do this until you have made a unanimous decision.

## Example

*Chairperson: "Most people have voted for meeting on Tuesday mornings. Two people have voted for meeting on Wednesdays. I am sorry that we cannot go for Wednesdays. What would it take for you to agree with meeting on Tuesdays?"*

*Anna: "Every other week, Bo and I have a class that we have to attend. So Tuesdays are fine, but we would not always be present during the entire meeting, so we would need someone to fill us in about the meeting."*

*Chris: "I do not mind bringing Anna and Bo up to speed."*

*Chairperson: "Okay, from now on, our meetings will take place on Tuesday morning, but Anna and Bo will not always attend the entire meeting, and Chris will fill them in about the meeting. Who says 'yes' to this proposal?"*



Radboud University (2021); CC BY-SA 4.0  
Based on: Kramer (2014), Lewis & Woodhull (2018) and Smouter (2018).

# THE CIRCLE OF EIGHT

Do you control the situation, or vice versa?

Do you ever have a bad feeling about how a team meeting went? Perhaps you feel like you were not heard, or maybe you got the impression that others were not really participating. The circle of 8 can help you deal with situations that leave you feeling frustrated. The model helps you make a conscious decision: do you let the situation continue to exist (the bottom circle) or do you take control (the top circle)?

## The bottom circle - puppet

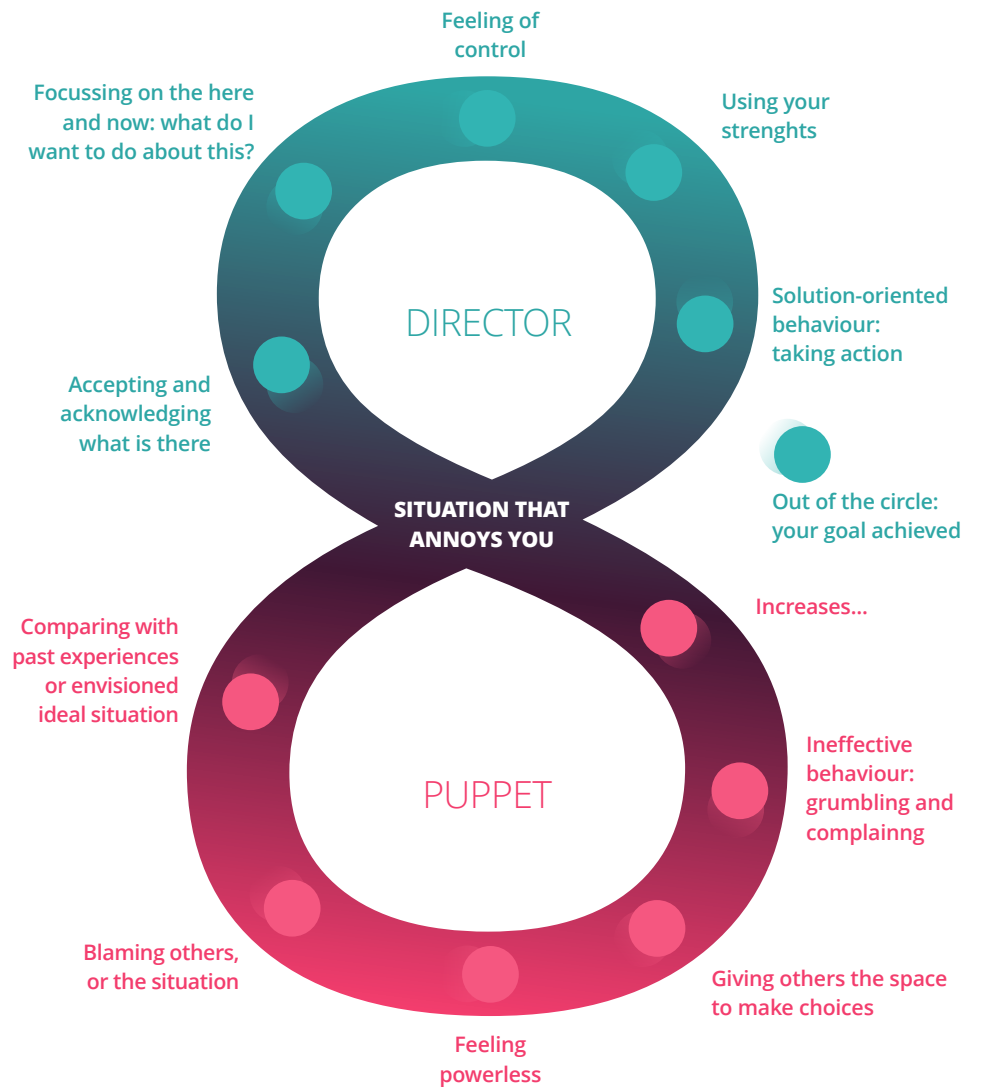
Sometimes it feels really good to grumble or complain to a good friend after you have been in a disagreeable situation. That is understandable. Gossiping is a connector, and complaining helps you blow off steam. But it usually does not get you anywhere. By complaining and blaming others for the situation, you reinforce the feeling of having no control. It is all happening to you. This way, you give others room to make the decisions, making you the puppet. This perpetuates the situation, which increases your dissatisfaction.

## The top circle - director

The alternative is taking control. This is not easy. Emotions are not just put aside. But they do not have to be. You acknowledge that they are there and then think of ways to improve the situation. You might realise that you are always a bit careful in meetings (*we could maybe...*) and that you can do this differently in the next meeting (*I would like to...*). Or you make the conscious decision to let it happen but to view it in a different way (they are just more extroverted than me).

Thinking about how you can change a situation is not always pleasant, especially if it forces you to face things that you find difficult. But it builds up your confidence, step by step. Although taking control is not always a recipe for success. There is still the context to contend with. Your fellow team members may not react how you had hoped, which causes you to be frustrated again. But even then, it is up to you how you deal with that. Do you change your tactics or do you leave the situation as it is?

- 1 On a piece of paper, write down in detail what it is that annoys you about a collaboration.
- 2 Study the circle of 8. Where in this model are you, if you consider your own actions in this situation? What elements reoccur in your story? What is the effect of your behaviour, thoughts and feelings in this situation? What do you learn from this?
- 3 Now completely make yourself the puppet of the situation by complaining to your heart's content. What do you do? What do you feel?
- 4 Cross over to the top circle. What do you do and feel when you take control?
- 5 What insights have you gained? What differences do you experience between the circles? Which one do you feel suits you best? Write down, considering the situation that annoys you, what concrete changes you will make.



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Based on Launspach (2018) and Peeman (2011).

# A GRIPPING STORY



Well-told stories not only have a clear structure, they often have exactly the same structure. Aristotle wrote about this, and Mumbai and Los Angeles founded their massive movie industries on this principle. Apparently, you can make endless variations based on the same, simple foundation. A good narrative structure is the key to a large audience, which goes for a novel or a Netflix series, but also for science.

But good scientists are not always good storytellers. Lectures and texts are often long trains of facts (...and...and... and...) or endlessly nuanced (...although...but... yet...). Scientifically sound, but the larger audience is bound to give up or become confused. And that is problematic when you want someone to invest money in your research or to do something with your conclusions.

Which is why Randy Olson, scientist and documentary maker, developed the ABT formula. Using this formula, he teaches scientists across the globe to communicate better about their work. ABT stands for And-But-Therefore and it is a formula because you only have to fill it in:

\_\_\_ and \_\_\_, but \_\_\_, therefore \_\_\_.

The first part of the formula (and) is the necessary background information. This

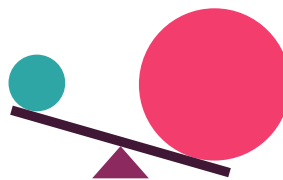
is where your story starts. You describe what your audience needs to know to understand the story and what is at stake.

In the second part of the formula (but), you describe the problem or the question that needs to be solved. Writers call this the conflict. A conflict is the core of every well-told story. Everything was running smoothly, until something happened (conflict!), and nothing was ever the same after that. Which is, in a nutshell, the story of just about every film and every novel you know. The conflict draws the attention and makes the audience curious about the ending. It is what keeps them on the edge of their seats.

The third part of the formula (therefore), is the solving of the conflict. This is where the built-up tension is released.

You can use the ABT structure on any level. You can use it to build a gripping sentence or a gripping paragraph, as well as a gripping story.

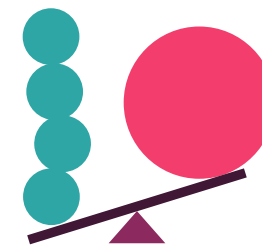
There is a good chance that a boring story lacks a conflict. So if you want to capture your audience's attention, the first thing you do is look for the conflict in every story you want to tell.



- 1 Meet in pairs (live or online).
- 2 Individually, describe the project you are working on, using the ABT formula. This is a first draft, so do not worry too much about the exact wording. It will be one long, awkward sentence that contains all the important information. Write the first part of the formula (AND) in blue, the second part (BUT) in red, the third (THEREFORE) in green.  
*For instance: The Dutch historical canon is taught in schools to teach young people the significance of historical events and figures AND to show them how those events and figures have influenced our current society, BUT a lot of young people are not interested in things that happened long ago or in people who were alive at the time, THEREFORE we have looked for motivating life lessons and inspiring role models within the canon.*

- 3 Read out your sentences to each other and, together, check if all the information is in the right place. Put everything relating to context in the blue part. Move all elements that have to do with the solution and that accidentally ended up in the red part to the green part.

- 4 Now write a second version. Use the ABT structure again, only this time



leave out all context and important information. This results in yet another awkward sentence, but one that shows the core of what you are working on. *For instance: It is important, BUT they think it is boring, THEREFORE we make it relevant.*

- 5 Read out your sentences to each other and work on them together until you have the barest version.
- 6 Now write a third version that holds the perfect balance between the first and the second sentence. Start working from the second sentence and, step by step, add the most important elements from the first sentence. Make it interesting and keep it short. What you end up with is the perfect summary to give a stranger who asks you to explain what you are working on.  
*In our example, this could be: The Dutch historical canon teaches pupils about the past AND how that past has influenced the present, BUT a lot of young people do not think history is interesting, THEREFORE we looked for inspiring historical role models.*

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Based on Olson (2015).

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