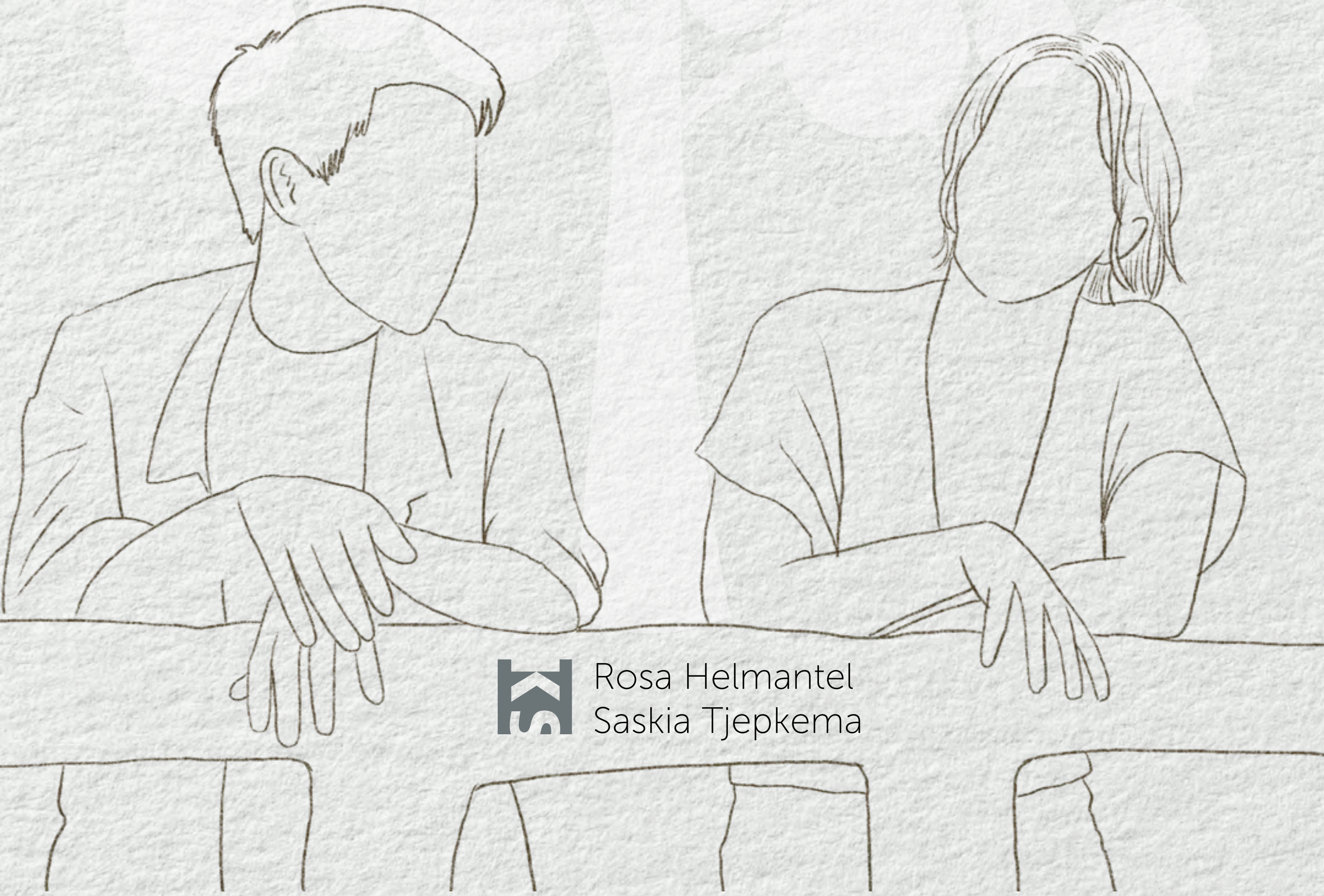
WORKBOOK

Positive conversations on development and growth



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This workbook

Reflecting with your employees on their performance, achievements, and professional development is a key element of your role as a manager. In many cases, these talks are spontaneous and unplanned – at so-called ‘water cooler’ moments. But in organisations, we also arrange formal moments such as performance reviews, assessment interviews, feedback rounds, and so on. These interactions are important on a number of levels. Of course they impact the performance and well-being of employees, but they can also foster mutual connection and cooperation, and (ultimately) benefit the functioning of your team or organisation. So, how do you go about conducting such conversations effectively? Both employees and managers take these formal meetings seriously, but also sometimes grumble about them, especially when they have become a bit of a chore and feel more like ‘tickbox’ moments that actually generate little energy. In this workbook we hope to provide you inspiration from *Positive Psychology* and *Appreciative Inquiry*, to help you create lively and productive ‘good conversations’ that leave both parties feeling energised and lead to practical intentions.

Positive Psychology

In order for conversations to contribute to people 'flourishing' at work, they need to be about more than just people's performance and their competencies. For example, it is helpful to reflect on someone's motivation, when they are performing at their best, and the areas in which they are most talented. And we can purposefully ask questions that strengthen resilience, or evoke a sense of pride and confidence. This book incorporates a range of positive psychology concepts that are helpful to consider when talking about professional development.

In short, the field of Positive Psychology investigates the factors that help individuals to thrive or 'function optimally'[1]. The PERMAH model, developed by Martin Seligman[2], identifies six key components that contribute to human well-being:

1. **Positive emotions** such as optimism, gratitude, mindfulness and resilience.
2. **Energy/engagement:** working from talent and flow
3. **Relationships:** authentic connections, belonging
4. **Meaning:** meaningful life, contributing to a greater purpose
5. **Accomplishments:** achieving and delivering results
6. **Health:** vitality, exercise, sleep

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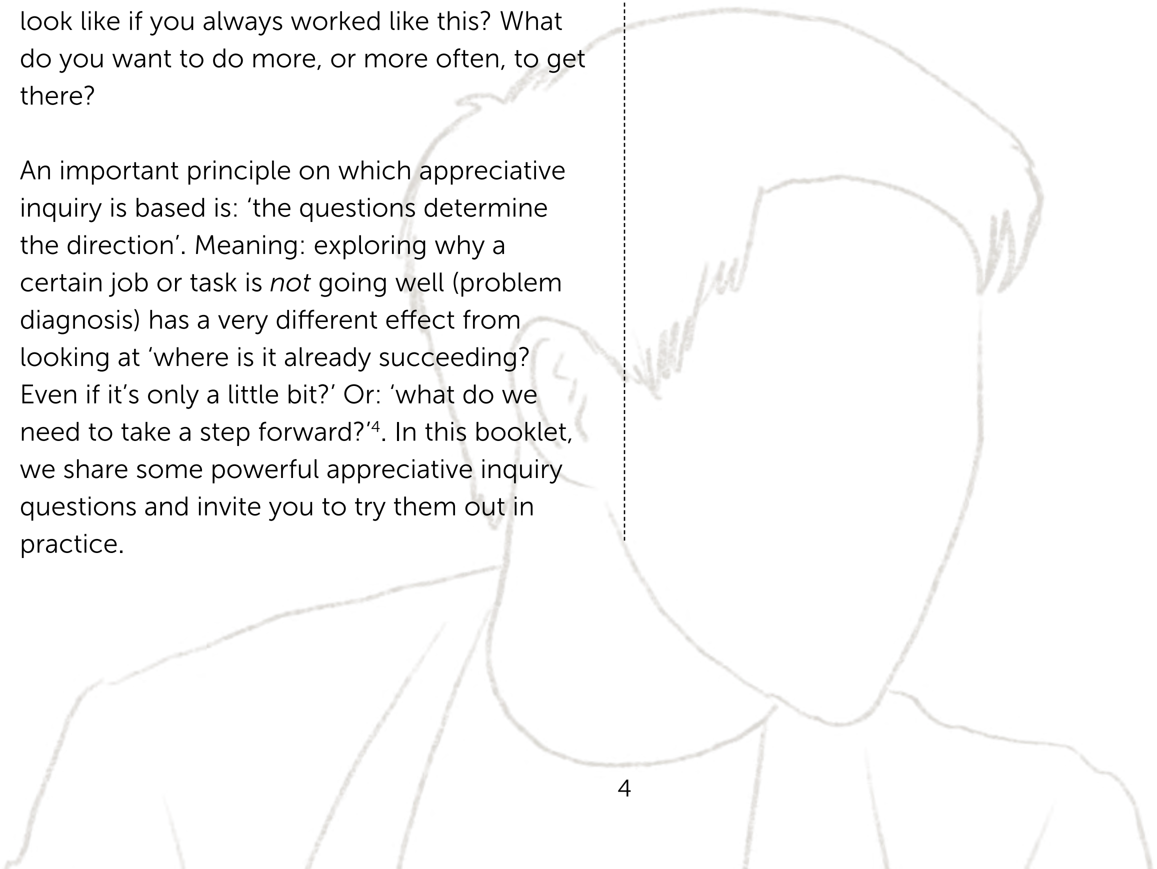
Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Shrivastva[3] that starts from the premise that growth happens when people work together to explore what they really value in their work (what matters most?) and when they are at their best. Identifying and analyzing such peak moments (what happened there? what were the elements that made it work?) generates energy and new ideas, boosts self-confidence, and strengthens connection.

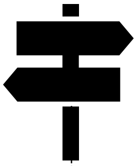
An appreciative inquiry can be oriented towards the past: when were you at your best? Or: when did you already tackle this task successfully? And what were the success factors? But it can also (subsequently) be aimed towards the possible future: what would it look like if you always worked like this? What do you want to do more, or more often, to get there?

An important principle on which appreciative inquiry is based is: 'the questions determine the direction'. Meaning: exploring why a certain job or task is *not* going well (problem diagnosis) has a very different effect from looking at 'where is it already succeeding? Even if it's only a little bit?' Or: 'what do we need to take a step forward?'[4]. In this booklet, we share some powerful appreciative inquiry questions and invite you to try them out in practice.

> Exploring why a certain job or task is not going well has a very different effect from looking at 'where is it already succeeding? Even if it's only a little bit?'



How to read and use this book



Every manager can sometimes use inspiration when conducting development-oriented conversations. This workbook has been designed with precisely that aim in mind.

It is not a step-by-step plan or guideline that you can follow to the letter. After all, conversations are human interactions; there is no formula for them. Instead, we invite you to browse and discover your own tools that you want to use. If you would like to read more theory, you can; if you would like to start with the techniques, you can do that too.
The book offers both:

Part 1: Background knowledge and theory: what is useful to know?

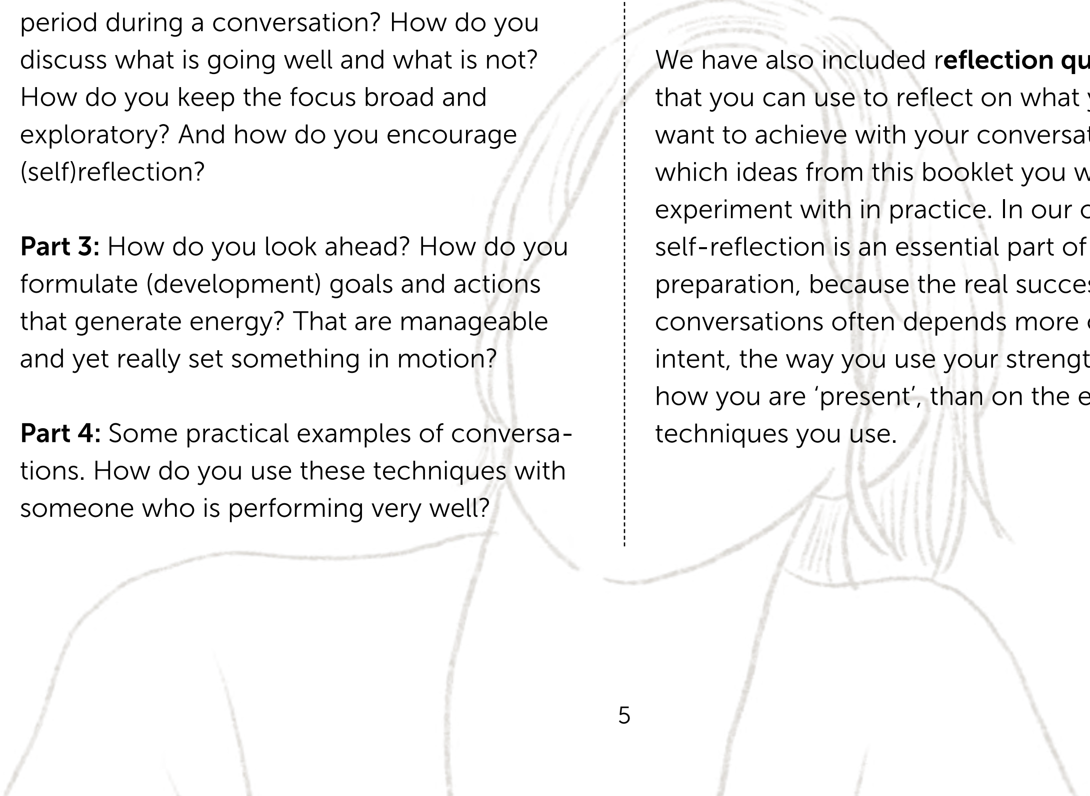
Part 2: How can you look back on a recent period during a conversation? How do you discuss what is going well and what is not? How do you keep the focus broad and exploratory? And how do you encourage (self)reflection?

Part 3: How do you look ahead? How do you formulate (development) goals and actions that generate energy? That are manageable and yet really set something in motion?

Part 4: Some practical examples of conversations. How do you use these techniques with someone who is performing very well? And how do you deal with someone whose performance is really lagging behind: how can you still take an appreciative and exploratory approach? We explore a few examples to illustrate how you could apply the techniques and working methods to guide the conversation.

Part 5: What if you get stuck in a conversation? No matter how well you prepare, conversations are unpredictable and erratic. Fortunately, we would say. They come alive in the moment, in the interaction between two people. And the playing field is broader than just appreciative inquiry. In this part, we offer a model that presents a broader spectrum: from negative, assertive conversations to appreciative-inquisitive ones and variants in between. This allows you to navigate and steer more effectively during the conversation.

We have also included r**eflection questions** that you can use to reflect on what you want to achieve with your conversations and which ideas from this booklet you want to experiment with in practice. In our opinion, self-reflection is an essential part of any preparation, because the real success of conversations often depends more on your intent, the way you use your strengths and how you are ‘present’, than on the exact techniques you use.



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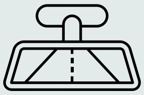

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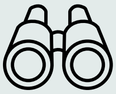

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REFLECTION

What do I consider important when conducting development-oriented conversations?

Conversation skills involve much more than technique. Your attitude probably has even more impact. That is why it is important to consider in advance what you consider important and why. This will make your invitation to others more clear and ensure that your intention comes across clearly in the conversation. Below are some questions that can help you with your personal reflection and that you can also use to discuss this topic with your employees.

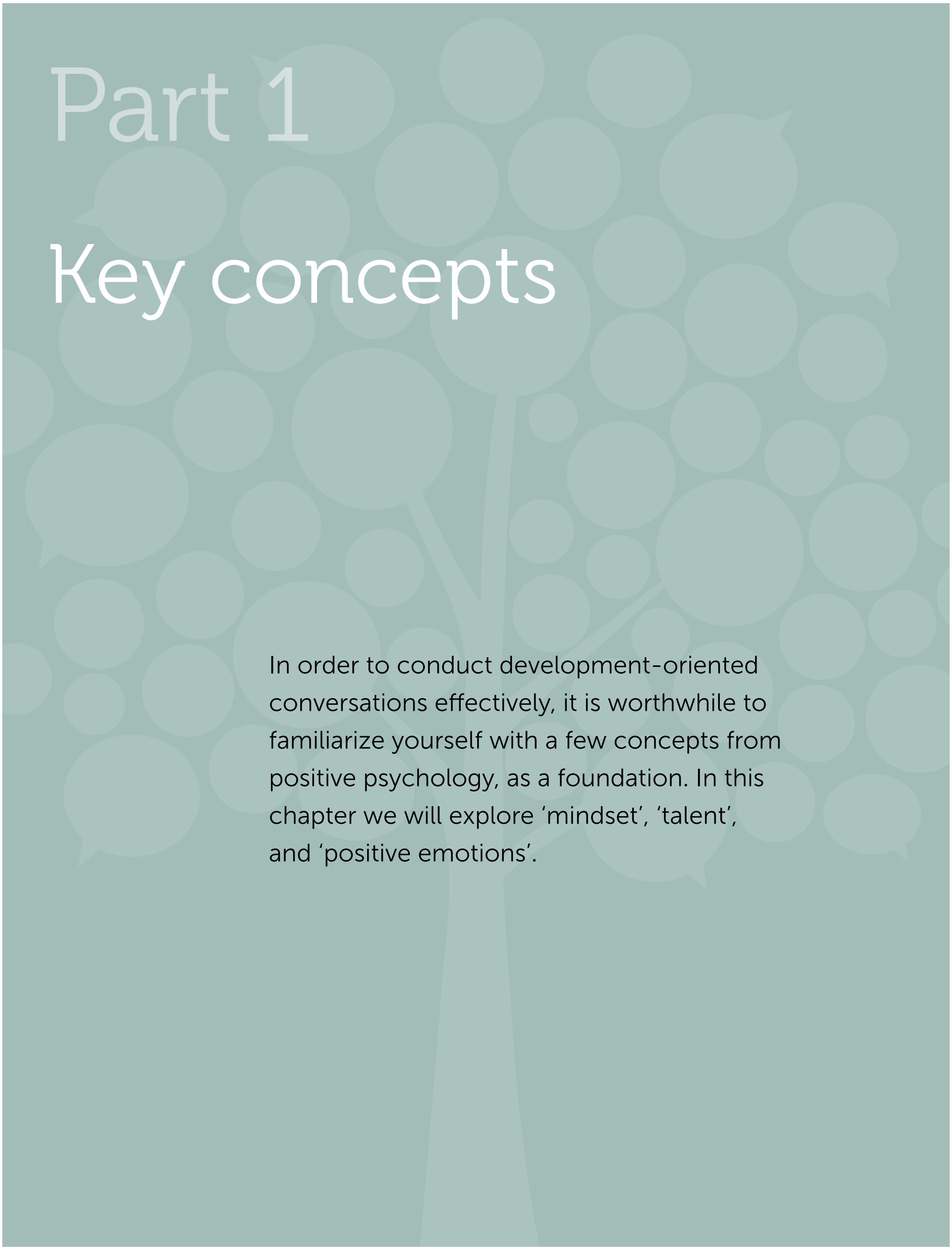
What do you see as the function and importance of development-oriented conversations? What purpose do they serve, and what makes them important to you?

What was your best development/performance review ever? What happened then? Why do you consider it a good example? What does it say about what you find important in these kinds of conversations?

Is there also a negative example that comes to mind? Something that makes you think: I would rather never do, or experience, that (again)? What was the sticking point in that conversation, something that is clearly essential to you? (In other words: what does this example say about what you find important?)

What strengths do you bring to the table when it comes to conducting development-oriented conversations?

What outcome do you envision for the development-oriented conversations you will be having in the near future? What do you hope they will lead to (how will you and your employee walk away from the conversation, what will the conversation set in motion, etc.)?



Part 1

Key concepts

In order to conduct development-oriented conversations effectively, it is worthwhile to familiarize yourself with a few concepts from positive psychology, as a foundation. In this chapter we will explore ‘mindset’, ‘talent’, and ‘positive emotions’.

Mindset

Our mindset is the way we think about our ability to grow and learn new things. Carol Dweck[5] identified two types of mindset: growth and fixed. With the former, you believe that you can improve and learn things that you are not yet good at. With the latter, you do not believe that - rather, you (implicitly) believe that your ability 'is what it is'.

Characteristics of a growth mindset are:

- Feedback feels like an opportunity
- When faced with setbacks, you persevere
- Mistakes are part of life
- The success of others is inspiring
- You take on challenges ('they are part of the deal and an opportunity to grow')

Characteristics of a fixed mindset are:

- Feedback feels like criticism
- When faced with setbacks, you give up
- You prefer not to make mistakes
- The success of others is a source of envy, and may feel like a threat
- You prefer to avoid challenges ('it won't work anyway')

We are often not aware of our mindset, but it has a major impact on how (and even if) we learn. That is why it is valuable to be able to recognize that mindset. It is important to realize that someone can have different mindsets in relation to different aspects of their work.

A person 'is' not their mindset; they simply 'have' a certain attitude – and it may differ for different topics and tasks. Think of a teacher who seeks feedback from colleagues about their mentoring role and would like to take on a few new challenging students next year, but at the same time dreads participating in the design group on the curriculum renewal for fear of failure.

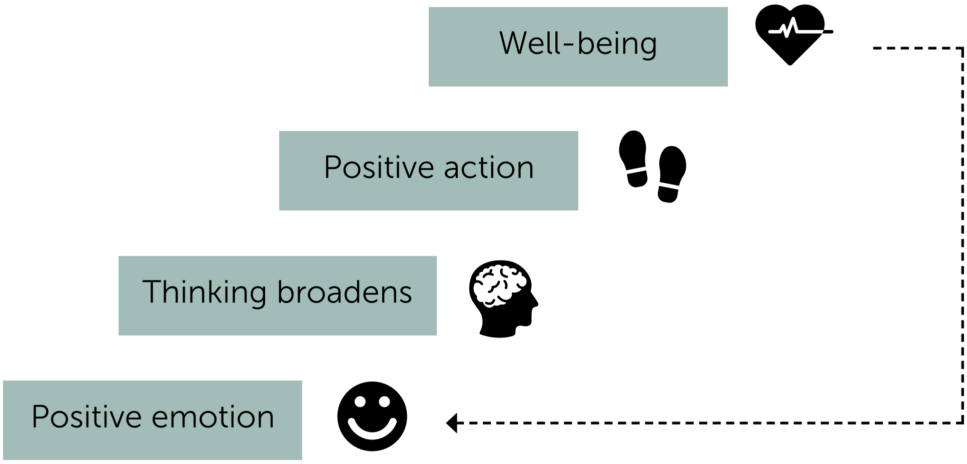
A fixed mindset may sound like resistance. The good news is that a fixed mindset can turn into a growth mindset, as Carol Dweck has researched. For example, by asking people about previous (small) successes in exactly the area they are insecure in, or the progress they have already made in that regard. This allows you to 'tinker' a little with the belief 'I'll never be able to do that', without getting into a discussion about it (because that never really works).

Appendix 1 contains a self-test that allows you to examine your own mindset while at the same time getting a better feel for the concept.

Broaden & Build theory

Barbara Fredrickson's Broaden & Build theory[6] explains how learning and positive emotions are connected. The human brain tends to focus primarily on negative events, like failure, which evoke negative emotions (all variants of fear, anger, and sadness). This can cause stress, making us less willing to take risks and less able to learn.
Positive emotions (such as pride, gratitude, hope, joy, and enthusiasm) have been shown to broaden our thinking and are therefore very important for learning.

When we feel positive, we become curious and dare to get started. This releases energy for action. And when we succeed, it has a positive effect on our well-being. This makes it easier to take the next step. Think, for example, of someone who has to use Excel to make a complicated schedule, something they really dread and feel insecure about. But then an experienced colleague takes pleasure in showing them the ropes, and provides a few first steps that are not too ambitious.
This boosts self-confidence and even creates a sense of camaraderie. This positive state makes it easier to start tackling the task by themselves the next day. And so on. Positive emotions evoked by small successes stimulate the learning process.



Strengths

People are often most aware of the things they are not very good at: their weaknesses. However, research shows that developing and nurturing your talents has a positive effect on both wellbeing and performance at work. Buckingham & Clifton[7] provide a clear definition of talents: “Someone’s strengths are their natural thought and behavior patterns.” Our strengths are therefore largely unconscious (we find it quite normal that our brain operates this way), but applying them to any task energizes us. A good way to detect someone’s strengths, therefore, is to look at which activities come easily to them, and which are satisfying and energizing. Someone with a talent for ‘action’ does not have to make an effort to get started, just as someone with ‘positivism’ does not have to make an effort to see opportunities, or someone with ‘empathy’ simply senses what is going on in another person. People get energised by what they do when they can use these strengths.

> Uit onderzoek blijkt juist dat het verder ontwikkelen van talent positieve effecten heeft op zowel het welbevinden, als de prestaties op het werk

People can also suffer from their talent when they ‘overdo’ it. Daniel Ofman[8] refers to this as ‘too much of a good thing’ in his book on the core qualities quadrant. The *overdrive* of someone’s talent often emerges under pressure or stress. For example, someone with a talent for ‘idea generation’ may be able to pace themselves well in a calm situation, but in a stressful situation, the ideas keep coming. Rather than making choices, they get stuck in brainstorming mode. To contain this overdrive, people can use so-called leverage skills—a term coined by Luk Dewulf[9]. These skills help to keep a talent in check under duress, and prevent it from becoming a pitfall. For someone with a talent for generating ideas, this could involve writing down ideas before they sharing them all. Or seeking out a colleague with an action oriented talent who can help make decisions and move on from the brainstorming phase.

The main idea of using talent or strengths at work is to look for ways to apply your talents in what you do. Finding authentic and sometimes even very personal approaches, perhaps even to everyday situations. In a way that is natural to us. Think for example, how different teamleaders go about creating a plan with their team. One may start by first locking him/herself away and coming up with an idea to work in small groups, while another may gather the whole team in a meeting room with lots of sticky notes and start brainstorming. Both of them can come up with a strong plan, supported by the team. They just go about it in their own way, playing to their strengths.

We can also (and perhaps should *especially*) use this strengths-based approach for tasks that don't come naturally to us. Imagine that you don't like networking at conferences, find it difficult to maintain order in the classroom, or struggle to write clear proposals, or... In all these cases, it doesn't always help to look at people who are naturally very good at these things, trying to copy them (they often have different strengths than you). Instead, you might also look at: how can I use my talents to complete this task successfully, in my own way? What do I have to offer? This often leads to authentic, original approaches.

How do you identify talents?

There are different ways to discover your strengths. You might take a test, such as the Gallup Strengthsfinder 2.0[7] or Martin Seligman's Authentic Happiness Survey (www.viacharacter.org/). But there are also other ways to identify talents. For example, you can:

1. Draw a personal timeline (more on this on p.18)
2. Conduct a success interview (more on this on p.19)
3. Create a wall of compliments in the team (more on this on p.21)
4. Ask questions aimed at identifying talents. For example:
    - What kind of work do you enjoy doing? What talents are required for this?
    - What do you often receive compliments about? What does that say about what you are good at?
    - When do you go home (or to work) with a smile on your face? What have you achieved then? What qualities of yourself do you use then?
    - What do you consider to be an important recent success? What did you do that contributed to the success? What was the effect of that? What does this tell us about what you are good at?
    - What side jobs or hobbies do you have in your private life? What qualities do you use in those?

When exploring talents, the invitation is not to stop at just one strength. Keep asking questions until several of a person's talents have emerged. Once you have identified several talents, it is important to actually *put them to work*. One way to do this is through job crafting, which is discussed in more detail in the chapter on 'Looking forward'.

How to find 'levers' for out-of-balance strengths?

As mentioned above, people can sometimes get into 'overdrive' on certain talents, turning them into a pitfall instead of a strength (e.g. a strong performance orientation turning into perfectionism, or an action drive turning into unfocused 'to-do'mode). This often happens under duress. In that case, it helps to look for 'levers' that can help reign in the strength. The questions below provide some starting points:

- Which talent do you want to focus on?
- How does this strength sometimes go 'overboard'? What does the overdrive look like?
- What happens then? What exactly do you do?
- What are undesirable effects of this behaviour?
- What situation triggers this 'overdrive'?
- What leverage helps you to contain your strength in such a situation?
- What should you do *more, less, or differently* to bring your talent back into balance?

Key take aways:

- People can have a growth or fixed mindset. This mindset determines how someone views their (development) potential.
- Negative emotions narrow our thinking, while positive emotions broaden it.
- A focus on talent has a positive effect on the well-being and performance of employees.

Part 2

In conversation: looking backwards

Development-oriented conversations often start with a reflection on the past. How have things been going recently? What went well? What could have gone better? In this chapter, we share a few approaches you can use to facilitate this process. But before we get into that, we first take a moment to explore the concept of ‘feedback’, as an important ingredient for learning.

Feedback

Negative feedback can be difficult to receive (especially for someone who is caught in a fixed mindset). Research by Sheila Heen and Douglas Stone[10] revealed various triggers that can cause people to become defensive when they receive negative feedback.

1. The **truth trigger** is a reaction to the content of the feedback. If we perceive it as incorrect or untrue, our brain shuts down. A comment such as "you never listen to your colleagues" can activate the truth trigger: after all, we do listen sometimes...
2. The **relationship trigger** is a reaction to the person giving the feedback. It doesn't really matter what the feedback is about. But the fact that *this particular person* is saying something about it, doesn't feel right... For example because this is someone we hold in high regard and want to think well of us. Or, conversely, because the feedback comes from someone who is (for example) new/inexperienced/inexpert/an outsider, making it hard for us to value their judgement.
3. The **identity trigger** is mainly about ourselves. Whether the feedback is accurate or not, we don't want feedback on who we feel we are or want to be. "I'm just a nice person. How can anyone think that..." We then interpret the feedback as something about our identity rather than our performance. That's why feedback on our parenting, for example, is more difficult than a tip on how to type faster on our cell phone. The more we associate our identity with a particular task, the more difficult it is to receive feedback on it.

These triggers can largely be avoided by:

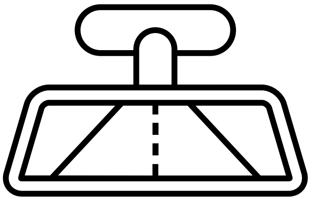
- **Making contact** and announcing that you are going to give feedback (and doing so at an appropriate time);
- Formulating feedback as factually as possible, by describing the behaviour and its subsequent **effect** (without judgment) as a series of events, almost if it were a little movie clip;
- Being **transparent in advance** about your expectations and what you consider important—so that your feedback does not come as a surprise later on. By being transparent on expectations you lay the groundwork for feedback.

Effective feedback is as precise and credible as possible. This applies to both negative and positive (reinforcing) feedback. Powerful feedback focuses on:

- Behaviour (what did you see someone do)
- Its effect (the performance, the result)
- A suggestion or tip for follow-up: what can that person do more often or more in the future, what talent can he/she use? Or do you have a question or request?

> The more we associate our identity with a particular task, the more difficult it is to receive feedback on it..

Counterintuitively, research by Carol Dweck revealed that positive feedback, or compliments, can sometimes evoke a fixed mindset. Compliments about the *person* (“you’re so good at planning”) or about the *result* (“wow, you finished that task quickly!”) can lead someone to experiment less with new behavior. This is because the person then thinks that you expect them to perform well again next time, but they don’t really know what made them succeed... That’s why it helps to be specific about what you saw: “I’m so glad you led the meeting so smoothly. You kept referring to the goal and cut off any side tracks, which kept the discussion focused and made it a more balanced conversation.”
A nice variation is the *complimentary question*, introduced by Coert Visser[11]. For example: “I see that students often leave your class in a good mood. How do you do that?” With this question, you give someone a compliment and help them think about the effective parts of their behavior. This allows a person to learn from their success (instead of putting pressure on them).



‘Looking backwards’- reflection and conversation tools

Giving feedback is one way of looking backward. However, research shows that learning is most effective when people actively **seek** feedback themselves. Moreover, no one sees everything: you often only see a small part of someone’s performance. How can you get a broader picture and how can your employee play an active role in seeking feedback on his or her performance?

There are many different ways to look backward together. Below, we highlight a few tried and tested conversation tools and reflection techniques.

Some are intended to encourage people to discuss their development with co-workers, while others are more focused on conversations between manager and employee.

Collecting and discussing feedback

An effective way of looking back at your performance of the last year is by using a feedback form to collect input from a number of colleagues and, optionally, other parties. Some organizations have a 360-degree form, but you can also come up with your own questions (what would you like feedback on?) or use the Reflected Best Self questionnaire, developed by the Center for Positive Organizations, in which you mainly look for examples of when you were “at your best” in order to learn from them (see appendix).

Before discussing the results between manager and employee in a development conversation, it is very effective to explore and share them in a peer group with colleagues first. (Preferably with colleagues from different teams). Everyone can bring their results to the peer group and discuss them, using questions like:

- What are you proud of? Why?
- What strikes or surprises you? Why?
- What concerns you? Why?
- What lesson do you take from the feedback?
- What questions do you have, going forward?

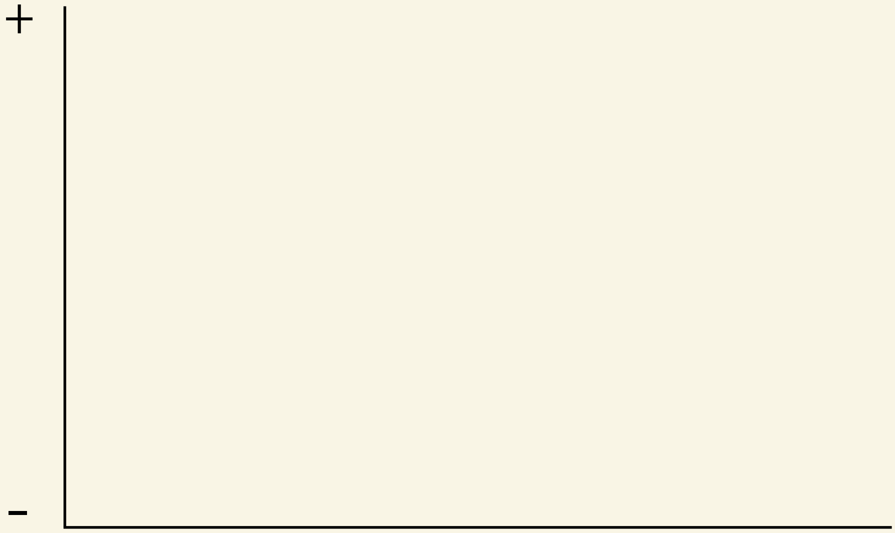
Ideally, the feedback is first discussed in pairs, so that everyone can go into depth and colleagues can ask each other questions. After that, the highlights can be shared in the group, with each person deciding for themselves what they want to talk about. And, above all, take a moment to reflect on the process: what was it like to do this? This exercise serves as good preparation for the development meeting with the manager and also lays the foundation for colleagues to brainstorm and support each other afterwards in their day-to-day practice.

Time line of the Past Year

Another way to look back is to ‘draw’ the past year as a graph with highs and lows. When did you feel in your element and perform well, and when less so? Together, discuss the highs and lows of the past year and look for common threads:

- When did you feel in flow (both feeling and performing well)? What talents did you use then? What context factors were important?
- When did you hit a low... (in terms of feeling and/or performing less)? What happened? What strengths were you unable to use? What context factors were important?
- How did you get yourself out of any low points? What did you do?
- What would you like to do in the coming year to be ‘in flow’ more often?

Of course, it is also possible to do this exercise for a longer period of time, if that makes sense; it doesn’t necessarily have to be a year.



Discovery interview: a peak moment

It's not always necessary to consider the entire year when looking back. It's also possible to pick one or more peak moments and examine them in detail. In a discovery interview, you choose a moment from the past year when someone was truly at their best; their performance was exactly as you expected and they were energized by what they were doing. It is actually a situation that you would like to see more often.
Invite your employee to think of such an example. And then explore the situation using the following questions as touchpoints:

Please tell me the story about this moment:

- What was the situation and what did you do (in particular; what did you do that worked)?
- What was the effect of your actions (on others, on yourself, on work/growth/performance….)?
- What are you proud of/satisfied with?
- What energized you?
- What does this story tell us about your qualities/talents when it comes to this type of performance, and what is important to keep in mind? What are the building blocks for success?

Such a discovery interview can be conducted both when someone has been performing well in a certain area, but also when they are struggling with a certain task (e.g., maintaining focus, taking the lead, planning work…). In the latter case, focus the interview on the "positive exception". For example: 'So, in general, you find it difficult to [maintain focus], but can you tell me about a moment when you did (somewhat) manage [to keep your focus]? Even if it was just a small example or a brief period. I'm curious to see what we can learn from this positive exception to the rule.'

Taking stock

For people who are visually oriented and/or like to work systematically, this is a great approach:

1. Ask someone to write down their most important goals for the past year on cards. Each card should contain one goal/plan.
2. Write down goals that were added during the year on cards of a different colour.
3. Organize the goals into categories:
    - (almost) achieved
    - not (yet) achieved
    - discontinued/no longer relevant
4. Look for common threads in each category.

As an alternative, you could create a matrix with achieved, not yet achieved, stopped on the horizontal-axis, and the amount of energy you got from working on a goal on the vertical-axis... This will give even a more nuanced overview and allow you to glean more information. Allowing you to delve deeper into the talents that someone did or did not use on different occasions.

When you do this activity with a group of co-workers, instead of in the performance meeting between manager and employee, this could be done in pairs. Or everyone can make a flipchart, after which people walk around (exhibition style) giving each other tips and feedback. This could serve as a strong prelude to a performance meeting between manager and employee.

Compliment Harmonica or Wall of Compliments

Since co-workers see quite a bit of each other's work, it can also be a good idea to encourage the group to provide input to one another. A brief yet effective way to accomplish this is through the Compliment Harmonica.

Compliment harmonica: everyone takes a white A4 sheet of paper and writes their name at the top of the sheet. The sheet is passed on to the person on the left. That person writes a compliment (positive feedback) and something they would like to encourage their peer to do more of in the coming year (feed forward).
Then they fold the sheet backwards so that what they have written cannot be seen, and pass it on to their neighbour on their left. This continues until everyone has written something on all the sheets and the sheets have gone around the circle.
Everyone now has a list of compliments and tips that they can read through, discuss with others, or reflect on individually and take along to their development meeting.

Compliment wall: this is a variation in which every team member takes a big flip chart sheet, writes their name on it, and hangs it on the wall. Everyone then walks around all the flipcharts and writes down the talents and strengths they have seen of their colleague over the past year.
This allows people to see each other's feedback and agree with it or add something else. It often generates a lot of energy in a group. A follow-up discussion in pairs is a good way to reflect on what was shared.

Part 3

In conversation: looking forward

After looking back, it’s time to look ahead: what goals do we set for the coming year? These often include both operational goals (what do you want to achieve at work?) and development goals (what do you want to learn?). How do you ensure that people can realize their potential? That they feel ownership of their goals and at the same time have the confidence to take on new challenges? In this chapter, we provide a number of reflection tools and conversation techniques, but first we address the question of what makes goals powerful and explore the concept of job crafting.

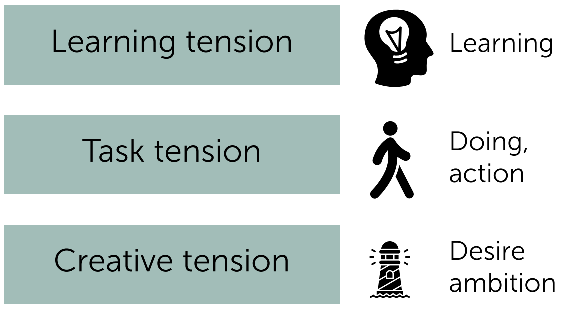
Setting goals

When setting goals, we tend to focus on problems that need to be solved or performance that needs to be improved, often driven by a sense of urgency. For example: ‘the class average of 4HC is well below that of all classes in that same year, so we need to take action’. However, such a ‘burning platform’ only motivates people in the short term – away from the problem – but development requires more direction and with that, a positive goal – what will you be working towards?

The tricky thing is that thinking in terms of problems often unconsciously leads to goals that are actually a ‘reverse problem’. ‘Eliminating the 4HC gap’, for example. Though it sounds like a goal, it actually provides little information about what needs to change. Change requires a positive goal, something to work towards. For example: a motivated class with healthy group dynamics, which achieves optimal educational performance (and therefore good grades).

Moreover, goals can be set at different levels. Peter Senge[12] came up with the concept of ‘creative tension’, which is the difference between where you are now and where you would like to be. This is linked to your motivations and substantive ambitions. Luk Dewulf[13] further developed the model:

- **Creative tension** can be simply defined as ‘there is something that is not there yet, but you would like it to be there’. It is a desire or ambition. Something you want to achieve. A motivated 4th-year high school class with healthy group dynamics, for example.
- This leads to **task tension**: you want to take action. In other words, you are not yet *doing* something that you would like to do: discussing motivation with the class, for example, or exploring with all the teachers and the mentor what their view is of what is happening. Asking an expert for help… It could be anything.
- This task tension in turn leads to **learning tension**: you want to become better at something in order to tackle that job. In short: ‘you can’t do something yet that you would like to be able to do’.
  For example: having an exciting class discussion, or: getting colleagues on board even if they are not so keen. Or delving into motivation and group dynamics and which experts there are in that field…



At each level, it helps to formulate **positive goals**. Sometimes you start with a kind of basic desire (creative tension) and explore what that might look like in practice (task and learning tension). But you can just as easily work the other way around: someone wants to learn something, and you explore what he or she wants to accomplish with that knowledge in practice and what makes it important to them. The main point is that motivation is stronger when it is anchored at these different levels.

And when goals are formulated in terms of what you *do* want, rather than what you want less of or not at all…

> Thinking in terms of problems often unconsciously leads to goals that are actually a "reverse problem".

Job crafting

Looking forward involves more than just setting goals. It is also important to consider how to approach things. It helps to take someone's talents and strengths as a starting point: what approach would suit…?

A helpful concept in this regard is 'job crafting', a term coined by Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane Dutton[14]. This involves making adjustments to one's work so that it better matches who you are, what you can do, and what you want. Job crafting can increase job satisfaction, enthusiasm, health, and productivity. Most people craft their job implicitly. They make small tweaks to their work (how they do it, which tasks they take on or not, who they work with, where they work, etc.) so that it optimally taps into their strengths. Sometimes it's worth crafting your job a bit more explicitly, especially when people are really unsure about a certain task.

This changes the question 'can I do that (or not)?' to '*how* could I do this?' and explicitly seeks approaches that suit someone's talents. For example, by identifying one's strengths and formulating an experiment with one's own approach.

But job crafting is also a good idea when someone experiences a general lack of energy from their work. Starting with the big picture. Mara Spruyt and Maria Dekker[15] wrote a practical guide for job crafting, as a process of consciously adapting one's work to one's talents, health, and well-being. This process starts with self-reflection.

Thinking in terms of problems often unconsciously leads to goals that are actually a "reverse problem." As the designer of their own work and the architect of their own learning process, it is essential that people know what is important to them. To find that out, it can be helpful to do a personal inventory of principal drivers, strengths, and which activities energize you. Questions that can help in this regard, include:

- Why did I start this work in the first place?
- What is really important to me in my life and work?
- Do I know what my talents are? If not, what do I often receive compliments about? When do I get energy from what I do? Does that reveal any talents?
- To what extent do I currently use these talents in the way I do my work?
- Which tasks at work do I regularly look forward to?
- When do I feel energetic, happy, and satisfied in my work? What task am I doing or did I do then?

To better align work with a person's strengths through job crafting, it is possible to consider four factors.

- **Tasks**: What tasks do you perform? Can you take on an additional task or, conversely, remove a task? And: *How* do you perform those tasks? Could you think of an approach that better plays to your strengths?
- **Relationships:** Who do you work with a lot? Which clients or customers do you encounter frequently? Could you and would you want to make changes in this regard? For example, working with first-year students instead of fourth-year students, or managing secretarial staff instead of policy officers, or switching regions with another sales manager...
- The **context** of your work: where and when do you do your work, and how does that suit you? Does it help to work from home sometimes? Or not?
- The **mental** aspect. How do you experience your work, and what does work mean to you? Are you (still) clear about what you contribute and what or who you do your work for? Sometimes it helps to (re)vitalize this picture: for example, by accompanying a colleague on the work floor and seeing how your work contributes to the primary process. Or, as a manager, by scheduling a few reflection meetings or attending an in-depth study day on servant leadership or another concept that appeals to you.

These different aspects offer starting points for discussing people's job, the satisfaction they derive from it, and how they could potentially foster and enhance that. In addition to self-reflection, experimenting with small adjustments in the work is also part of job crafting: systematically making small changes, in order to find out what works.

Looking Forward: reflection and conversation tools

Just like with reflection, there are different ways to look forward. Below you will find some commonly used tools for inspiration.

Looking ahead with the end-of-year question

Especially if you have a performance review in January, it's a good time to ask the end-of-year question:

Looking at your talents, at what gives you energy, what you're already achieving, and the work that lies ahead, what are your next work goals/ achievements.... Where can you continue to develop, what can you expand on, do more or do better?

a. What do you see yourself doing by the end of the year? What results do you want to celebrate by that time?
b. What makes it worthwhile for you, in what ways do these activities and results provide fulfillment?
c. What skills will you need to learn to achieve these goals, and how would you like to learn them? *Sometimes a course is needed, but often experiments at work or support from a colleague are sufficient.*

It can be worthwhile if your employee talks about these questions with their peers, before or after the development meeting with you as a manager. The added benefit is that people will know more about the path their colleagues are on and will therefore be better able to encourage or support each other.

What to do with the 'gaps': route a, b, or c?

There are always things in someone's performance and growth that are not going well, and require attention.... Before you know it, these gaps end up as 'areas for development' in the report, but not much else happens with them. In order to make sure that someone can really work on them, follow up questions are necessary. A simple but effective line of inquiry is to think in terms of options A, B, or C:

a. See if someone can approach the difficult situations/things that are not working out yet *in a different way* - drawing on their own talents: i.e. come up with different approaches that suit this particular person better;
b. Find a support structure or assistance so that someone doesn't have to learn it, but can still get it done;
c. Decide that it is an area for development, that it is important for someone to try to master/practice this. And explore together what is needed to learn this (a course? A coach? A mentor? ...?).

Whichever route you take, it is important to follow up with a concrete plan of action.

Again, it can also be very productive to explore these areas amongs co-workers. Together, people can help each other choose a 'strategy' for each difficult issue and work it out in more detail. They can even agree on who will be a 'buddy' for which co-worker to check in regularly and discuss progress.

The dream question

For some people, the dream question works well. Especially as a follow up of the discovery interview. They organize their thoughts by visualising the desired future. For example by creating a mind map, a collage, finding a postcard or painting, choosing a metaphor,... The dream question is:

Imagine waking up in 2 or 5 years from now, and you are doing work that perfectly suits you, every day...

- What do you see yourself doing?
- Who are you working with?
- What kind of environment do you find yourself in?
- What is the essence of this dream? What it's all about?

Based on this dream image, it's possible to delve a little deeper:

a. *When you look at what you do today and what keeps you engaged in your work*: Which of your competencies or strengths, or which aspect of your work is the most important to develop further...?

b. *When you look at yourself and your work:*
  - Where do you want to focus your attention?
  - What do you want to invest in?
  - What will be your first step to do differently/more/less?

Like the other reflection tools for looking forward, the dream question is also very suitable to use in a peer-to-peer reflection amongst co-workers. Especially if people have done a discovery interview, a Reflected Best Self inquiry, or a history line, so that they already have concrete examples of when they are at their best at work (in terms of both performance and energy).

Getting started with experimenting

Experimenting with new behavior is an essential part of learning. Sometimes, during your conversation, you may want to go a step further than just discussing the learning and development goal, and go on to explore how someone can put it into practice. This helps someone move beyond "good intentions."

Thinking together about how someone could approach a particular task differently, kick-starts their learning process. It sets a process in motion of alternately experimenting (one small step) and reflecting upon that action.

Questions that help to come up with a *first* experiment:

- What would I like to work on and why? What task or issue would I like to deal with and what makes it urgent for me and my colleagues?
- What would I like to learn from this myself, what do I want to discover about myself?
- What is the first situation I will encounter at work that I can change? (For example, the first meeting with co-workers or the next lecture I give to students, or...)
- How could I design or organize that situation differently?
- What is the smallest thing I could do differently?
- What skills do I have to do this?
- Who and what do I need for this small step?
- How and with whom will I reflect on this experience and think of the next step?

Part 4

Sample conversations: deploying these tools in practice

In the previous parts of this workbook, we discussed various reflection tools and interview techniques that you can use for a development-oriented conversation. Of course, such a dialogue will not look the same for everyone and in every situation. If someone is performing very well and feels good about themselves, for example, your conversation will require a different approach than if someone's performance is lagging and/or they may not be getting much energy from their work. And then there are also people who are simply doing 'just well enough'.

Frank Kwakman[16] states that it helps to approach your conversation differently with people who perform *above expectations*, people who perform *as expected*, and people who perform *below expectations*. To give you an idea of how you could focus your conversation in each situation, we have worked out three sample conversations with fictional characters. These are not 'scenarios' to follow, but they will hopefully help you get an idea of how you can use the techniques and focus your inquiry.

Myra

the excellent performer

Myra is a 28-year-old English teacher who is extremely enthusiastic about the school where she works, her students, and her profession. She has been working at your school for about six years now, having started immediately after graduating. As her manager, you are very satisfied with her; she understands her profession and does what is expected of her in her role. Myra plays an important role in the problems surrounding a particular first-year class. She has shown that she is very capable of being the spider in the web of teachers involved, so that problems can be solved. As far as you are concerned, she will eventually grow into a team leader, but she is not yet thinking about that herself.

If you're not careful, the development & performance meetings with Myra will become shorter and shorter, because you are actually very satisfied with her performance. Or.... you will focus together on that one thing that is not going perfect, even though that may make it seem bigger than it is. (A familiar pitfall: compare it to a student with a report card full of As and one D; that D quickly draws the most attention...). That's why you're looking for ways to challenge her more and discuss this with her. How could you use the techniques in this booklet?

1. Success: complimenting and analyzing

You could start by *formulating positive feedback.*

- Which result or achievement would you like to compliment her on? What particularly impressed you?
- What did you notice about Myra’s approach that led to this result? What behavior did she display?
- Do you see certain of her strengths reflected in this?
- Can you also see when she is truly in her element and feels most energized from her work? When is she in flow? What do you want to say about that?

If you are not entirely sure about the answers to these questions, you might want to ask a *complimentary question*, for example: “I see that you play an important role in dealing with the problems in the first year classes. Somehow, you manage to involve all teachers in the discussion and guide it towards finding solutions. Do you recognize that? Do you know how you manage to do that?”

You could also conduct an *discovery question* interview on a peak moment. Together, pick an example of a situation that Myra herself looks back on positively (she achieved good results and it gave her energy) and explore it together:

- What exactly did you do?
- What was the impact of your actions?
- What gave you joy or fulfillment in this situation?
- What does all of this tell us about your qualities and strengths? And what are other success factors?

Or you could ask her to draw a *timeline* of the past year, because that will shed a light on those moments when things are both going well and Myra is ‘in flow’. Together, you could analyze those peak moments: what happens there, what tasks does she perform in those moments, how does she approach them, what is remarkable about the context or setting?

What does all of this teach you about her strengths and the conditions that help her to achieve good results and be energized at the same time? NB. it may be more important than you think to help high performers understand where their success comes from. Receiving only positive feedback on their performance, or knowing that they are good at something, may foster a fixed mindset - creating pressure to repeat their good performance. This makes it less easy to continue learning and experimenting. When people have more insight into the underlying success factors in their approach or understand the strengths they use, this actually stimulates a ‘growth mindset’. It is certainly worth paying close attention to this with young professionals (high potentials).

2. Building on what is going well: performance and development goals

Even if you score 'maximum' on all work goals and competencies on the performance review form, it is still good to focus on someone's next step, or challenge. These may be related to work goals or performance, or to personal growth (e.g. further developing strengths, opportunities for career advancement), or both.

Especially if you have conducted a discovery interview or a timeline interview, it is easy to follow up with such a 'forward oriented' question, for example in the form of the *dream question* or the *end-of-year question.*

In any case, it helps to explore both the level of learning and task tension and the level of creative tension, for example with questions such as:

- When we look at ... (next goal), what do you see yourself doing (result)?
- What makes it worthwhile for you (fulfillment, drive)?

The second question is particularly important, because it strengthens Myra's commitment and self-knowledge – and you, as her manager, also gain more insight into what exactly makes her enjoy her work.

3. Addressing what needs improvement (and how)

As with everyone, there are areas where Myra needs to improve because she is not currently performing well enough in those elements of her job. Although you did not focus on these during the interview, they still require attention. You could consider whether:

1. she can approach the areas she is struggling with *in a different way than she is now* (an approach that is based more on her own strengths); or
2. you can come up with a support structure together or seek help, so that Myra does not have to master it but the task is still done properly; or
3. you decide together that it really is an area for development, that it is important for her to try to learn this, either by a course, a mentor, experimenting on-the-job, ...

Imagine that you have noticed that Myra finds it challenging to share her ideas in conversations with more experienced colleagues. This is not an issue that you want to ignore, and it is also complicated to devise a support structure for it. However, you can explore together what is holding her back and, more importantly, whether there have been moments when she has already spoken up to some extent (the *positive exception*) and what helped her to do so. From there, you can explore together which talents Myra can use to speak up more often.

Finally, you can double-check whether you have formulated a positive learning objective (and not accidentally a reverse problem). Can Myra really envision this? And can you come up with a first *experimen*t together?

Jeffrey

the reliable performer

Jeffrey is a 42-year-old sales manager, who has been working in your team for years. He is a reliable worker who is always present, meets deadlines and targets, and is somewhat quiet but constructively engaged in team meetings, especially when you explicitly ask for his input. Jeffrey does not often take center stage, nor does he ever stand out, but his sense of responsibility and collegiality contribute to the team's performance. He is the "quiet power" type. What would you like to discuss with him?

1. Investigating and analyzing: how are things going?

Since Jeffrey's performance is satisfactory, you can start with that, though it is also worth considering starting with the general and open question: *"How are you doing?"* To gain more insight into where he really excels, where he gets the biggest fulfillment, and where his strengths lie. Helpful follow-up questions could be:

- When do you go home feeling happy and energized? What happens on such a typical good day?
- And, on the flip side, when do you feel drained?
- When did you perform well? And when less so?
- What is the ratio between good and lesser performance? Is it a healthy balance?
- Can we see a pattern? When are you at your best (both in terms of performance and energy)?

Drawing a *timeline* of the past year can also work well: it will give you more insight into the moments when Jeffrey really feels in flow and when he sometimes feels drained even if that doesn't directly show, or translate in his performance.

2. Building on what goes well: a discovery interview

It's important to let Jeffrey do what he's good at and what energizes him as much as possible. A *discovery interview* can help identify peak moments, when that happens. You can start such a conversation with the question:

"When was a moment when you were at your best? You performed well and felt in flow. You would like to experience this more often… What is the first moment that comes to mind?" Together, you can explore that moment with discovery questions:

- Briefly describe the situation (who was there, what did you work on,…)
- What did you do in that situation?
- What activities and behaviors were expected of you?
- What talents and qualities did the situation require of you?
- What gave you fulfilment in that situation? What are you proud of? What energized you?

After this appreciative inquiry of a peak moment, it is possible to stretch Jeffrey and invite him to think about new opportunities by asking the *dream question*: Suppose we fast-forward time 2 or 3 years ahead and your work is like this one peak moment every day: what would we see you do then? What would you no longer do? What would the work and the day look like? In what environment? By visualizing this possible future state, it is possible to extract the essence of what is most important to Jeffrey and what direction he would like to see his work develop.

Subsequently, you can then create focus by comparing the dream with the present. The question is: which aspect(s) of Jeffrey and his work are most important to develop further, given the ideal image? What deserves more attention?

Finally, you can further solidify that perspective and come up with an *experiment* together:

- Where do you want to focus your attention in your work right now?
- What do you want to invest in?
- What will you do differently/more/less as a first step?
- What/who do you need?

3. Addressing bottlenecks and points for improvement

Even though Jeffrey is a well-performing colleague, there are still areas where he struggles and needs help. There are different ways to explore how he could tackle these issues:

1. Can he approach the areas where he struggles in a different way (based on his own strengths)
2. Is it possible to find a support structure or assistance so that he doesn't have to learn or do it himself, but it still gets done properly (e.g., an intern who trains Jeffrey and then helps with the sales reports)?
3. Is it an area for development that he wants to invest in to really learn (and if so, how: a course, coaching, experimenting on-the-job, etc.)?

To make sure this is something Jeffrey really wants to work on, check whether the goal is formulated in a *positive* way (meaning that you can actually visualize it, that you have an image of the desired behavior) and whether you both understand what makes it *worthwhile* for him to work on it.

Hank

whose performance is falling short of expectations

Hank is a 35 year old policy consultant in your department at a healthcare institution. He is primarily concerned with the quality of care. You have been meeting with him for some time now because of feedback from the department that the policy documents and advice are not always practical and that colleagues on the work floor feel they receive little support from Hank. They sometimes feel that he is too rigid about what is required by, for example, the inspection authorities and protocols, and would like to see more flexibility and input. You would like Hank to engage with his department in a different way, but so far he sees it differently. It is difficult to get a clear picture of what is going on in his mind. How could you approach this conversation from an appreciative perspective?

1. Clear feedback

In this case, you have a clear opinion about Hank's performance and you also know that he does not always see it that way himself. That is why it is important to make your feedback open to discussion. Here are a few tips that may help:

Ensure a good start by:
- Making contact (for example, making eye contact and checking that you are both sitting comfortably)
- Announcing that you are going to offer some feedback
- Ensuring your body language is appropriate (for example, make sure your facial expression and posture show that you are serious)

Structure your feedback well by:
- Describing what you see happening, as factually as possible by describing observable events and behaviour (like a "movie clip"): "I notice that...," "I see that...,"
- Identifying the impact of those events and behaviour: 'the result of this is...', 'this has the effect that...'.
- Outlining what you would like to see happen and making a suggestion: 'I would like to see a change in this...', 'I suggest that...'.
- Pausing for a moment to allow the other person to respond.

In Hank's case, this could perhaps sound like: "I notice that when colleagues ask you for help, you regularly point out what is not possible or what is required by protocols or the law. That is, of course, part of your job, and it's good that you monitor that aspect. However, if you leave it at that, the result is that colleagues do not feel supported and don't know what to do with their questions and problems. What I would like to do is work together to find ways in which you can really help your co-workers when they have a question that affects the quality of care."

Then give Hank the opportunity to respond: does he recognize this? Where would he agree, and where would he disagree? What examples come to mind?
Of course, it is also relevant to mention what is going well—that can be part of the feedback.

2. Investigate

The next step in the conversation could be to investigate the situation more thoroughly. There are basically two ways to do this:

- Explore the problem: what exactly is going on? What are co-workers saying? What specific situations are involved? What are causes for Hank's behaviour?
- Investigate the *positive exceptions* with an *discovery* interview: when *does* it go well? When were co-workers happy with the help Hank provided? What exactly happened then? What insights can we gain from this experience to improve the Hank's performance in this area? By investigating these positive exceptions, you can discover building blocks for future success and discover which strengths Hank can successfully deploy. Moreover, thinking about positive exceptions is also a way for the co-workers to try to articulate what they actually expect from Hank.

The second approach is recommended, and it helps if you yourself already have an example ready of such a moment that you would like to share. That immediately helps to make it clear to Hank what exactly you mean by your feedback and what you expect of him. Examples speak louder than descriptions alone and help to formulate a positive goal. Moreover, it also fosters confidence in all parties that Hank can meet expectations.

3. Identifying improvement goals

The final step is to identify improvement actions, based on the inquiry you have done together. It is important to make use of Hank's talents and keep his job fulfillment in mind. These actions for improvement can consist of small steps. A useful tool to identify these is the *scale question*:

- Draw a horizontal line from 0 to 10, where the '10' represents the ideal situation (in this case: people on the shopfloor feel supported and Hank also feels good about his work, and they both contribute to quality of care).
- Ask Hank to choose where he currently feels that he stands on that line: a 6? A 7? (It doesn't really matter if it's exactly 'right'. It's about his own assessment).
- The next question is: what makes you stand there? What are you doing that already works? What do you have to offer? What can you build upon? What steps have you already taken?
- Explore: what could you do to move one step further on this line?

It is important to examine whether the chosen direction of development is formulated as a *positive goal* (is it concrete, can you visualize the desired behaviour and situation?). And to keep an eye on Hank's levels of *creative, task, and learning tension*. For example by also checking what makes it worthwhile for him to grow in this regard.

REFLECTION

Preparing a development conversation

Who do you want to have a performance and development conversation with?

What message do you think is most important for this person?

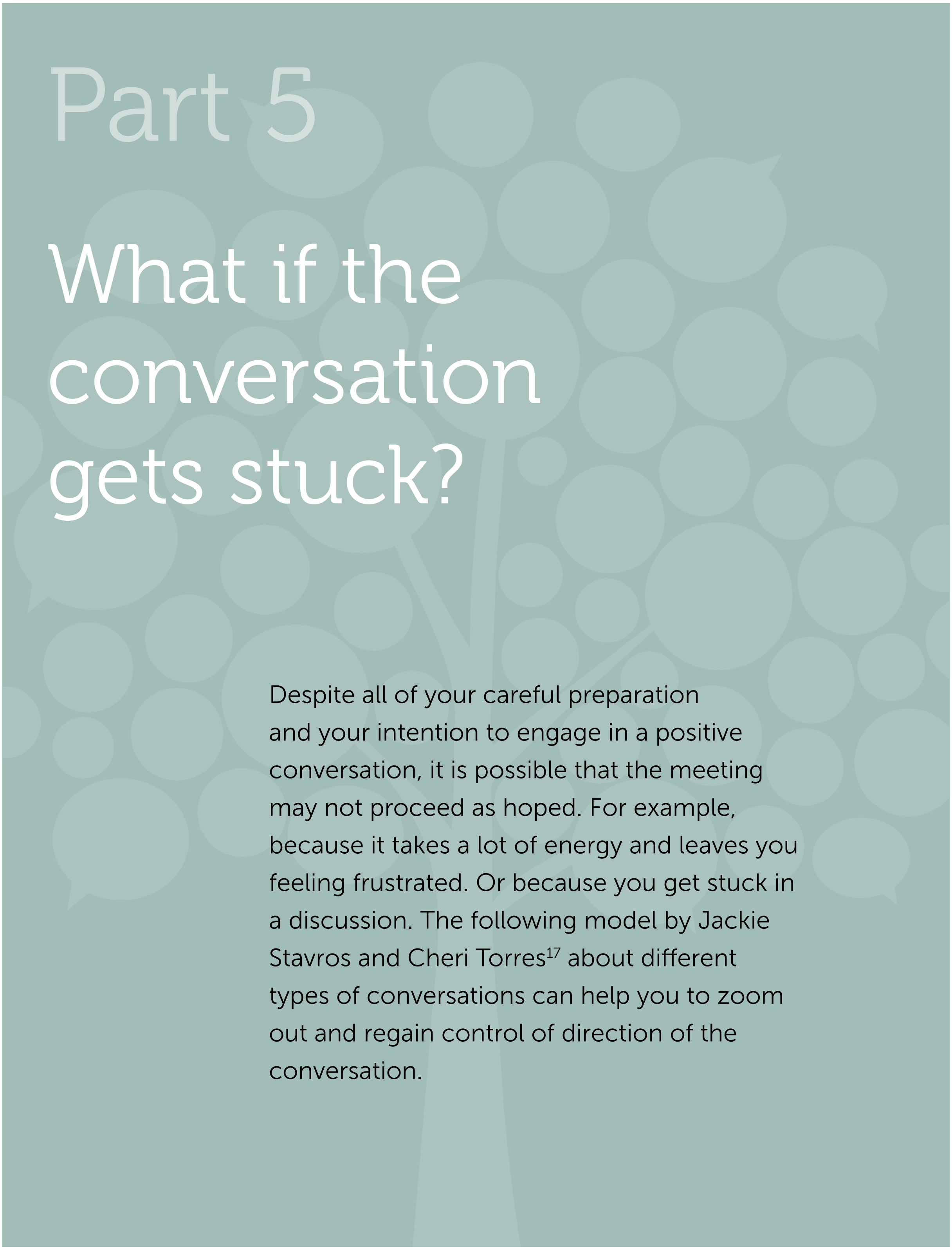
If everything goes well, how will this meeting go? What will, ideally, happen? How will you both look back on the conversation at the end of it?

Why would you hope that things go this way? What is important to you?

How would you like to look back on the past time period with your colleague? What reflection tools and conversation starters do you consider?

How do you want to look ahead to the future? What reflection tools and conversation starters would you like to use?

What strengths of yours will you bring to bear to make this conversation a success? (And is there anything you will refrain from doing?)



Part 5

What if the conversation gets stuck?

Despite all of your careful preparation and your intention to engage in a positive conversation, it is possible that the meeting may not proceed as hoped. For example, because it takes a lot of energy and leaves you feeling frustrated. Or because you get stuck in a discussion. The following model by Jackie Stavros and Cheri Torres[17] about different types of conversations can help you to zoom out and regain control of direction of the conversation.

	Inquiry based	**Statement based**
Appreciative	Appreciative Inquiry	Affirmative conversations
Depreciative	Critical conversations	Destructive conversations

Taken as a whole, this model shows the entire playing field in which you can move during a meeting. To have a positive conversation, you don't have to engage in an appreciative inquiry all the time. It may well be that you also want to engage in a critical conversation. You can vary in the type of exchange.
Sometimes conversations are **empowering (generative)**, in the sense that they generate ideas and energy, contribute to a better relationship, and boost self-confidence. We distinguish between:

- **'Appreciative-inquiry':** conversations with appreciative questions and dialogue. People start to see new opportunities and solutions and get energized.
- **'Affirmative conversations'** mainly contain positive judgments, affirmation, and compliments. These are also valuable, to a certain extent. Compliments alone, for example, can reinforce a fixed mindset, and the conversation can also get stuck because you no longer come up with new ideas (if things are going well, what more could you want?).

Then there are conversations with provocative, **confrontational**, more problem-diagnostic and evaluative questions and interactions:

- Conversations with tough feedback, for example. We call these '**critical conversations**'. They are also worthwhile and necessary because they clarify and sharpen things. This may be necessary because you really want to connect with someone when you have different expectations of their performance.
  It is important that these questions are exploratory and open (for example, why does it work this way? How does the recipient of the feedback view it?).
- Conversations that have a predominantly negative effect on energy, relationships, and well-being because negative comments and statements are exchanged are "**destructive conversations**." There is no more inquiry here, only debate. These are the conversations you want to avoid as much as possible.

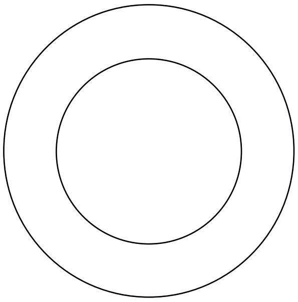
Imagine having started a conversation on a positive note, but ending up in a ‘affirmative conversation’ and feel the energy draining away. In that case, you could try to use a question to make the conversation more exploratory again. For example, with a complimentary question, a discovery interview, or a dream question.

Or: you may have started a conversation clearly with critical feedback because someone’s performance is falling short of what you agreed upon, the message got across, and then... ? Then it is worth seeing if you can take a step towards ‘appreciative inquiry’. By exploring a *positive exception,* for example.

When your conversation has really been stuck in negative statements to and fro, and has turned into a discussion (destructive conversation quadrant), it sometimes helps to take a broader view, not just focusing on what is not working, but also on what is *going well* (move from depreciative to appreciative focus). Or you could try to make the conversation more exploratory rather than assertive, by asking questions about the content of the feedback or about how it is received (move from statement-based to inquiry-based). Sometimes, you can then take another step towards an appreciative inquiry.

How are things going and how do you want to proceed?

To develop yourself in any field, it is important to pay attention to the progress you are making. That is more difficult than you might think: our brains tend to focus on what is not going well (yet) and the goals that still lie ahead ('negativity bias'). As a result, we don't always stop to think about what we have already achieved. Filling in the progress circle developed by Gwenda Schlundt Bodien[18] and Coert Visser[19] can help you gain insight into what you are already doing well, for example, in terms of conducting development-oriented conversations, and what your next steps could be.



Once you have conducted a number of development conversations, it is worthwhile to fill out a progress circle. Draw two circles. In the inner circle, write down the progress you have already made. Questions that may help you reflect on this:

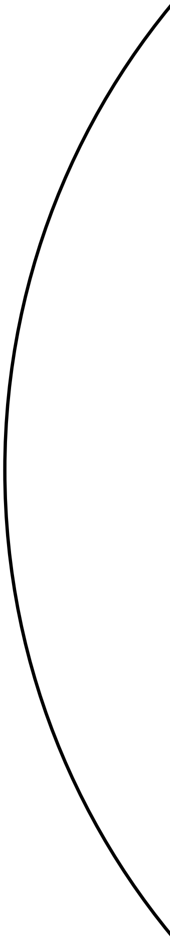
- What have you already achieved in relation to development-oriented conversations?
- What has already been successful? How did that happen?
- What has already worked?
- What are you already satisfied with?
- What is already improving? What is already going well?
- How did you/did you all achieve that?
- What is the advantage of having already achieved this?

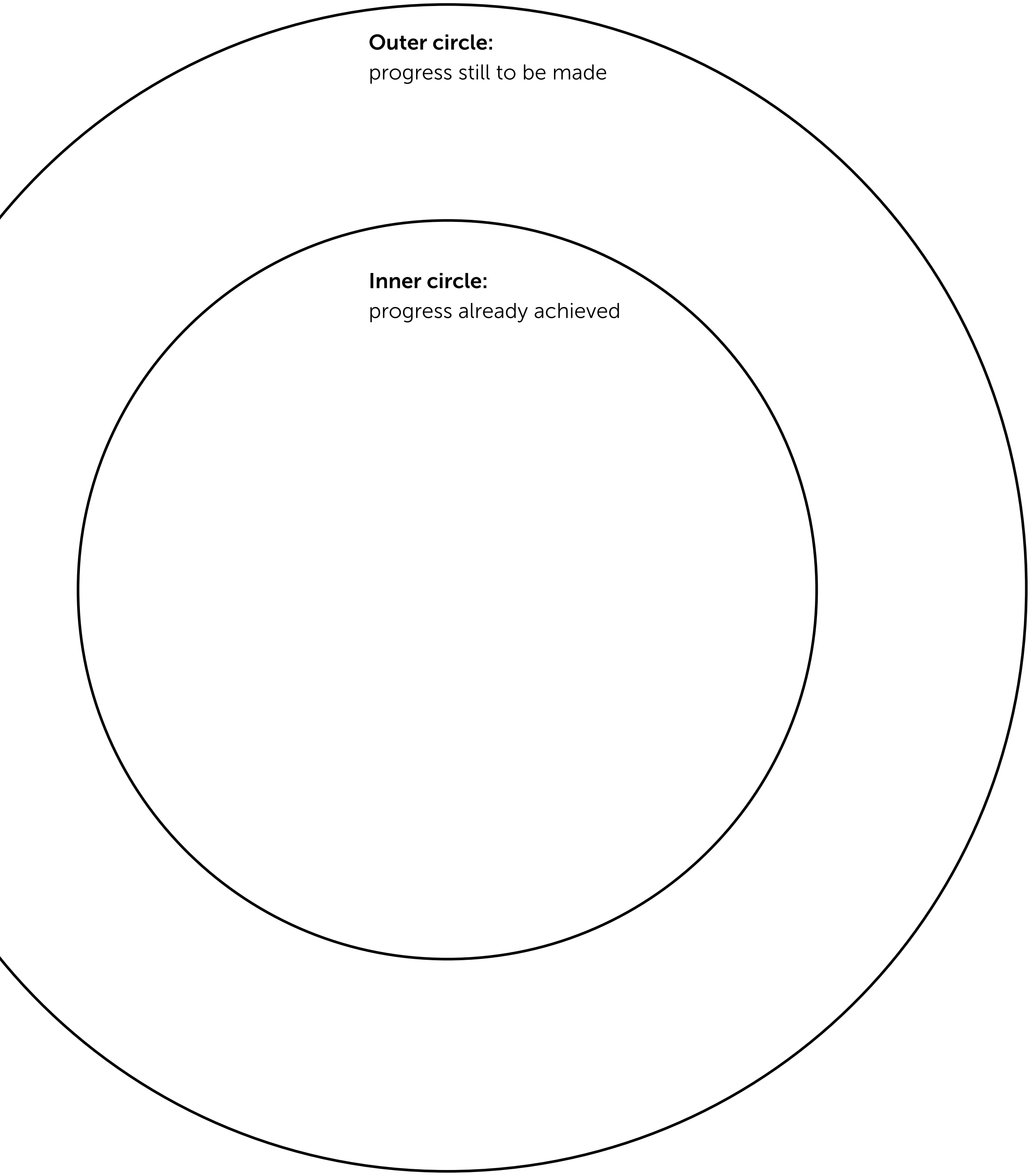
Next, write down your ambitions for your next growth steps in the outer circle. Questions that help you think this through, are:

- What else would you like to achieve?
- What does the desired situation look like?
- What further progress is important to achieve?
- What will improve when you achieve that?
- How will you know that you can do something better?
- What will you do differently?
- What is the advantage of this?
- Suppose it is X months later and you are satisfied with what you have achieved. What have you achieved?

Finally, choose one element from the outer circle that you want to work on first: that will be your next step.

NB: you can of course also use this tool with your colleagues who are working on their good intentions after the development interview.




Outer circle:
progress still to be made
Inner circle:
progress already achieved

REFLECTION

What will you take away from this book?

At the end of this booklet, here are a few reflection questions to help you think about what you have learned while reading and completing it, and what that means to you.

What will you really do differently from now on when conducting development and performance conversations?

Is there anything you will never do again?

What strengths can you use to structure development conversations effectively?

What would be the ideal development-oriented conversation for you?

What else would you like to keep in mind?

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APPENDIX 1: Check your own mindset

You can use the exercise below as a simple test for your own mindset. Think of a specific area of your work, such as a specific task.

1	My intelligence is what it is	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I can develop my intelligence
2	I do not like to be challenged	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Challenges are there to be tackled
3	No matter how much effort I put in, some things I cannot do	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Effort makes me better at what I do
4	Feedback rarely helps me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I can learn from all feedback
5	Success is proving myself	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Success is developing myself
6	My results show who I am	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I am more than my results
7	I am bothered by the success of others	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I am curious about and learn from the success of others
8	I am not allowed to make mistakes	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I am always allowed to make mistakes
9	I can learn new things, but my talent determines the level I can reach	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I can learn new things, I do not yet know all my talents
10	How much talent a person has is fixed; you cannot change that	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	How much talent you have is not fixed.

The statements are structured from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. The more you score to the left, the more you show a fixed mindset. The more you score to the right, the more you show a growth mindset. Your mindset may differ depending on the subject you have in mind.

APPENDIX 2: Timeline / history line of your strengths

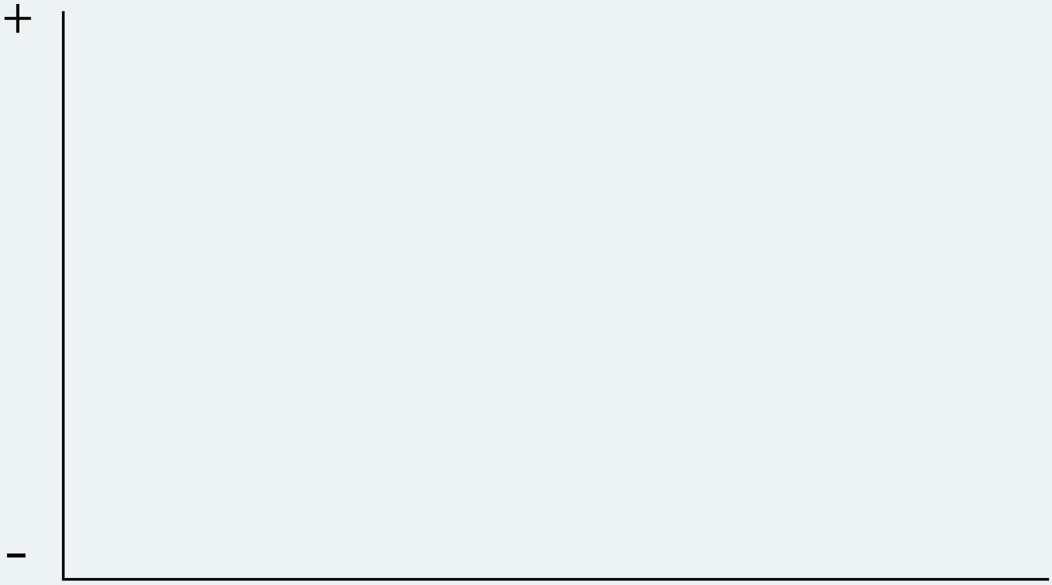
Draw a timeline from roughly your first day at work (or earlier, you can choose where to start) to today, and replay the movie in your head: What have you experienced?

1. What were the highs and lows? Moments when you:
   - were ‘in flow’ … + (or not….-)?
   - did what you are really good at (or not)?
   - were proud of yourself for what you did/do (or not)?

2. Examine those important highs and lows: What did you do, what did your work look like? Which of your strengths were called upon (or not)? Which abilities did you use to get through (and out of) the low moments?

3. How does this give you insights into your qualities: what are you good at? What do you enjoy doing?

4. And what does it say about the context that is important to you? In what kind of environment (role, people, setting…) do you perform well? (or not).



APPENDIX 3: Reflected Best Self

The Reflected Best Self (RBS) is a powerful tool for gathering feedback from people who have seen you at your best in various areas of your life, both personal and professional. You choose who you ask and how broadly you cast your net.

When we ask others for feedback, we usually hear what we could do better. That is also what we expect. However, we receive little feedback on the things we are good at or that we do effortlessly. We also pay little attention to this ourselves, with the result that we are often unaware of our strengths. The RBS helps here by gathering information about when others see you at your best and analyzing those responses.

Process

1. Make a list of +5 people from different parts/stages of your life: private, work, previous job, volunteer work… people who have literally seen you at your best, from different perspectives in different contexts. You choose: who has seen you in situations or roles that you would like to know more about?
2. Ask each of them: “When was I at my best?” Ask for specific examples and situations. You can do this by email, but sometimes people prefer to do it verbally.
3. Look for patterns in the answers: what do they tell you about your strengths (in terms of your fundamental thinking and behavior patterns) and the kind of impact you can have on the people around you?

>>

Questionnaire

To get the most valuable feedback, it is important not to ask people what strengths or qualities they think they see in you. It is more effective to ask for specific examples of behaviour. With the following question:

“Can you describe a moment or moments when you saw me at my best?”

- What was the context (briefly describe)?
- What did I do?
- Do you know why I did that?
- What impact did my actions have? On others, on the situation…
- How could you tell (from my face, my behavior…) that I was “at my best”?

(This takes people a maximum of 5 minutes to describe).

Sources: Center for Positive Organization, Michigan Ross University (development) & Avthar Sewrathan (tooling). Want to read more? https://hbr.org/2005/01/how-to-play-to-your-strengths

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