

Coaching to prepare students for their school-to-work transition: conceptualizing core coaching competences

Citation for published version (APA):

van der Baan, N., Gast, I., Gijsselaers, W., & Beusaert, S. (2022). Coaching to prepare students for their school-to-work transition: conceptualizing core coaching competences. *Education and Training, 64*(3), 398-415. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-11-2020-0341>

Document status and date:

Published: 26/04/2022

DOI:

[10.1108/ET-11-2020-0341](https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-11-2020-0341)

Document Version:

Accepted author manuscript (Peer reviewed / editorial board version)

Please check the document version of this publication:

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- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

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Education + Training



Coaching to prepare students for their school-to-work transition: conceptualizing core coaching competences

Journal:	<i>Education + Training</i>
Manuscript ID	ET-11-2020-0341.R3
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	School-to-work, Work readiness, Coaching, Employability competences, Higher education, Workplace

Coaching to prepare students for their school-to-work transition: conceptualizing core coaching competences

Purpose –The present study proposes coaching as a pedagogical intervention to prepare students for transitioning to the labour market. Taking a competence-based approach, the proposed coaching practice aims to enhance students' employability competences to facilitate a smoother school-to-work transition. However, what transition coaching looks like remains largely unclear. Moreover, in competence-based education, teachers are expected to be highly skilled coaches, facilitating students' transition to the labour market. The present study aims to map the core competencies of a transition coach.

Design/methodology/approach - A qualitative design was adopted to map the core competences of a transition coach. Data were collected from two focus groups, consisting of coaches in higher education and in the workplace.

Findings - Results show that, to create the necessary support conditions, a coach creates a safe coaching environment and supports students in setting goals, guide them in the activities they undertake to attain these goals, and asks reflective questions. Moreover, the coach stimulates students' ownership by putting the student in the centre of the decision-making process. Furthermore, the results emphasize the importance of the coach's professional attitude and knowledge about the transition process and the labour market.

Practical implications - The article concludes with practical implications for novice transition coaches and teachers in higher education.

Originality/value – The present study adds to the agenda of graduate work readiness by proposing a coaching practice aimed at preparing students for their transition to the labour market.

Keywords – school-to-work transition, work readiness, coaching, employability competences, higher education, workplace

Paper type – Research paper

Introduction

School-to-work transition marks an important turning point in the lives of many graduates. In 2017, for example, approximately 4.8 million students in the EU completed higher education and took the first step into the labour market (Eurostat, 2019). However, that transition does not always go well, and an unsuccessful transition to the labour market can have long-term consequences for the careers of starters, such as long-term unemployment, lower job satisfaction and accepting a job below their skill level (Baert, Cockx, and Verhaest 2013; Ryan 2001; Salas-Velasco 2007).

Traditionally, research on the transition to the labour market has taken a labour economics perspective (Teichler, 1999) and focused on the duration of the transition process, for example, how long graduates take to find adequate employment (e.g., Vanoverberghe *et al.*, 2008). However, the transition period brings more challenges than merely obtaining a job. Among them, key issues are related to job fit, and how students acquire the necessary competencies enabling them to adapt to the dynamic workplace and continuously develop themselves (Braun and Brachem, 2015; Winterton and Turner, 2019). In this respect, it is essential to facilitate graduates in making the shift from the relatively stable context of higher education to a context that is still largely unknown to them. Graduates often encounter difficulties adapting to this new context, because they feel unprepared to cope with the demands of the workplace (Grosemans *et al.*, 2017). Preparing students to cope with these demands of the workplace is an important task for higher education, in order to help students to adjust more easily to the dynamic labour market (Koen *et al.*, 2012). It has thus become apparent that transition is a process, rather than a single event; it starts as early as the final year of higher education and only ends when graduates have found adequate employment in the labour market (Grosemans and Kyndt, 2017; Nicholson, 1990).

Because of the disconnection between higher education and the world of work, the Bologna declaration in 1999 initiated a change from the delivery of knowledge towards putting knowledge in the context of students acquiring competences. Higher education's increased focus on graduates' acquisition of competences geared to the needs of the workplace (e.g., Baird and Parayitam (2019);

1
2
3 Braun and Brachem (2015)). This has influenced the emergence of competence-based education
4
5 focusing on required graduates behaviour within a range of relevant job situations and the knowledge,
6
7 skills and attitudes (Baartman *et al.*, 2007). Competence-based education is expected to better prepare
8
9 students for their transition to the labour market and their professional future (Koenen *et al.*, 2015).
10
11 Within competence-based education, more emphasis is given to the coaching and guiding role of
12
13 teachers. In addition, guiding students in acquiring and developing the necessary competences for the
14
15 labour market and supporting them in formulating their own learning goals is seen as an integral part
16
17 of the teaching profession (van Dijk *et al.*, 2020; Koenen *et al.*, 2015). However, how teachers can best
18
19 coach students in higher education as well as support them in acquiring and developing competences
20
21 required for the labour market remains unclear (van Dijk *et al.*, 2020; Spence and Oades, 2011).
22
23 Therefore, concrete coaching guidelines are needed to support teacher in their role as a coach to
24
25 facilitate students' transition to the workplace.
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29
30 In higher education, several pedagogical and didactical interventions have been implemented
31
32 aimed at acquiring and developing students' generic competence, such as work experience through
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34 internships and work placements. In this respect, it aims to support students in their school-to-work
35
36 transition. For work experience to contribute to the acquisition and development of students'
37
38 competences, students need to be guided or coached to learn from these experiences. Without
39
40 proper guidance these experiences are seen "as isolated pockets of learning" (Blackwell *et al.*, 2001,
41
42 p. 282).
43
44
45

46
47 Coaching has already been studied as an intervention aimed at facilitating students'
48
49 transition to the labour market in different contexts (Gannon and Maher, 2012). In their study,
50
51 Gannon and Maher (2012) evaluated a coaching program in the Hospitality and Tourism sector in a
52
53 UK university aimed at enhancing student employability. This study showed that the program was
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55 seen as a valuable intervention providing networking, industry insights, advice and opportunities
56
57 support to foster students' employability. To support students in their competence development,
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1
2
3 Spence and Oades (2011) have developed a theoretical framework for coaching. Encouraging
4 competence development goes along with a coach providing relatedness support, competence
5 support, and autonomy support. However, how a coach can create these supporting conditions to
6 enhance students' competences required by the labour market and thus facilitate the transition
7 process remains unclear (Spence and Oades, 2011). Moreover, the transition process only ends at
8 the workplace, when graduates have found stable jobs in terms of job position (part-time/full-time)
9 and job satisfaction (Grosemans and Kyndt, 2017). Therefore, to support the full school-to-work
10 transition, coaching for this transition not only takes place in higher education but also in the
11 workplace. Existing coaching frameworks, such as the framework of Nora and Crisp (2008) of
12 coaching in higher education or the framework of Spence and Oades (2011) of workplace coaching
13 aim at academic, personal and professional development, and outline different characteristics and
14 competences of a coach. However, to the best of our knowledge, a unified framework of
15 characteristics and competences of a coach that is based on research situated in higher education
16 and the workplace is still lacking.

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The present study proposes coaching as a pedagogical intervention aiming at preparing
students for their school-to-work transition by supporting in acquiring and developing competences
required by the labour market. The present study identifies concrete coaching competences by
reporting on two focus groups with experienced coaches in higher education and the workplace and
answering the following research question:

What are the core competencies of a transition coach?

Theoretical Framework

Coaching for the school-to-work transition starts in higher education and continues at the workplace.
However, coaching in higher education and coaching at the workplace are conceptualized differently.
Therefore, the first step in designing a theoretical framework for coaching for the school-to-work
transition is synthesizing the literature on coaching in both higher education and at the workplace,

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2
3 coaching goals and coaching competences, such as the support behaviours a coach provides. The
4
5 focus lies on the 'who', 'what', 'why' and 'how' of coaching.
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8 ***Coaching in Higher Education***

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11 Ample research has been done on coaching in higher education (Crisp and Cruz, 2009; Gershenfeld,
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13 2014; Nora and Crisp, 2008). Gershenfeld (2014) defined coaching in higher education as a multi-
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15 dimensional construct with multiple purposes. However, academic and student success remains the
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17 primary goal of coaching in higher education. Coaching in higher education can also aiming at
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19 competence and professional development. In a recent review, Nuis and Beusaert (2020) define
20
21 coaching in higher education as a formal, structured process based on a supportive, reciprocal coach-
22
23 coachee relationship. In the setting of Higher Education, coaching sessions are often offered as
24
25 individual sessions. Not only can a faculty member coach students, but more experienced peers or
26
27 alumni may also guide students in their academic development (Lu, 2010). Various support
28
29 behaviours are necessary to stimulate the academic development of the coachee. Previous research
30
31 has indicated that a coach should provide the coachee with (1) *psychological and emotional support*,
32
33 (2) *psychosocial support*, and (3) *career path support* (Nora and Crisp, 2008; Nuis and Beusaert,
34
35 2020; Ragins and Kram, 2007).
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41 *Psychological and emotional support* refers to the coach as a listening ear. The coach actively
42
43 and empathically listens to the fears and problems of the coachee to establish a safe climate. The
44
45 coach also provides moral support and ongoing feedback regarding the fears and problems the
46
47 coachee is willing to discuss. Discussions "must be conducted in a safe environment as perceived by
48
49 the mentee" (Nora and Crisp, 2008, 343), so that the coach is able to identify the problem and
50
51 propose a solution to the coachee. To establish a safe environment, the coach must provide
52
53 *psychosocial support*, in which the interaction between the coach and the coachee is pivotal.
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57 Psychosocial support refers to the presence of trust and intimacy in the interaction between
58
59 coach and coachee. Psychosocial support also refers to coaching behaviours that promote students'
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1
2
3 personal growth concerning aspects such as self-efficacy and self-worth, including acceptance and
4
5 confirmation (Ragins and Kram 2007).
6
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8 In addition, the coach provides the student with *career path support*. Career path support
9
10 includes coaching behaviours that Ragins and Kram (2007) called *career functions*. “Career functions
11
12 involve a range of behaviours that help protégés ‘learn the ropes’ and prepare them for hierarchical
13
14 advancement within their organizations” (Ragins and Kram 2007, p.5), such as showing the student
15
16 how to seek and apply for jobs (Crisp and Cruz 2009). By providing career path support, the coach
17
18 stimulates the coachee to reflect on his/her learning experiences (Nora and Crisp, 2008).
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22 ***Coaching at the Workplace***

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24
25 Coaching at the workplace is primarily aimed at workforce development (Bozer and Jones 2018;
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27 Cameron and Ebrahimi 2014; Jones, Woods, and Guillaume 2016). Workplace coaching is a goal-
28
29 oriented process based on trust and discretion, and depending on the goal, workplace coaching can
30
31 have a variety of outcomes (Grant and Cavanagh, 2007). In their review, Blackman, Moscardo, and
32
33 Gray (2016) found a range of positive outcomes associated with workplace coaching, such as career
34
35 development and advancement, improved psychological and social competencies, and enhanced
36
37 self-awareness, assertiveness, and self-efficacy. In their meta-analytic review, Jones, Woods, and
38
39 Guillaume (2016) distinguished between the affective, cognitive, and skill-based outcomes of
40
41 workplace coaching. Affective outcomes refer to attitudes and motivational outcomes, such as self-
42
43 efficacy, well-being, and job satisfaction. Knowledge gains fall under cognitive outcomes. Skill-based
44
45 outcomes refer to the learning of new skills, such as leadership skills or problem-solving skills.
46
47
48 Workplace coaching was found to have positive effects on all types of outcomes, with the largest
49
50 effect size for the cognitive outcomes. Together, these cognitive, affective, and skill-based outcomes,
51
52 or knowledge, attitudes, and skills, can be referred to as competences. Thus, to promote workforce
53
54 development, coaching at the workplace is primarily concerned with competence development.
55
56
57 Because coaching at the workplace is a goal-oriented process, based on trust and discretion (Bozer
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1
2
3 and Jones, 2018; Jones, Woods, and Guillaume 2016), it is not necessary for the coach to have
4
5 experience or expertise in the coachee's area of work. Coaching can also occur between two people
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7 of equal status within the organization (Jones, Woods, and Guillaume 2016).
8
9

10 Spence and Oades (2011) develop a coaching framework on how workplace coaches can
11
12 support employees in their competence development. These authors took a motivational perspective
13
14 and argue that the self-determination theory (SDT) provides "a useful set of ideas for guiding [a]
15
16 coaching practice" (p. 39). SDT assumes that people are inherently capable of behavioural change
17
18 under the right circumstances and with the right supporting conditions. Personal development
19
20 largely depends on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs of the coachee: autonomy,
21
22 competence, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci 1985; Spence and Oades 2011). A coach at the
23
24 workplace can provide support for these three basic psychological needs. In providing *autonomy*
25
26 *support*, the coach places the coachee at the centre of the decision-making process, by encouraging
27
28 ownership over the coachee's own goal setting and development. The coach assists in establishing
29
30 personal development objectives for the coachee and encourages proactive behaviour from the
31
32 coachee by supporting goal accomplishment and professional growth (Jones, Woods, and Guillaume
33
34 2016; Spence and Oades 2011). To create a feeling of competence, the coach provides *competence*
35
36 *support* by assessing the coachee's abilities and talents, rather than focusing on analysing the
37
38 problems. This is supported by a study conducted by Grant and O'Connor (2010), who showed that
39
40 solution-focused coaching, in which people are connected with their strengths, led to better
41
42 outcomes in terms of self-efficacy, goal-orientation, and positive affect compared to problem-
43
44 focused coaching. Effective coaching can only take place in a safe environment, where the coachee
45
46 feels safe to discuss personal problems and issues (Ragins and Kram 2007). Coaching is a person-
47
48 centred process, and by providing *relatedness support*, a coach can establish this safe coaching
49
50 climate. By actively listening to the coachee, showing empathy, and being attentive and responsive,
51
52 the coach is able to satisfy the coachee's need for relatedness (Spence and Oades, 2011). By taking
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3 care to satisfy these three basic psychological needs of the coachee, a coach is then able to promote
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5 employees' competence development at the workplace.
6
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8 *Towards an integrative View of Coaching in Higher Education and Coaching at the*

9 10 11 *Workplace*

12
13 Although coaching in higher education and coaching at the workplace are defined differently,
14
15 similarities can be identified. Before investigating the core competences a transition coach needs,
16
17 the present study compares the 'who', 'what', 'why', and 'how' of coaching in higher education and
18
19 workplace coaching. Concerning the 'what' and 'why' of coaching, both coaching practices can be
20
21 defined as a formal, goal-oriented process based on a relationship of trust between the coach and
22
23 coachee. Both practices aim at competence development, whether it is student success or workforce
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25 development, through the development of competences.
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30
31 Next, overlap can be found in the 'how' of coaching. First, *career path support* is offered in
32
33 both contexts. In higher education, providing career path support involves giving support in setting
34
35 career goals and making decisions, by asking questions and stimulating students to reflect on their
36
37 learning experiences (Crisp and Cruz 2009; Nora and Crisp 2008; Ragins and Kram 2007). At the
38
39 workplace, a coach provides *competence support* and assists employees in establishing personal and
40
41 professional development goals by providing the employee with ongoing feedback (Bozer and Jones
42
43 2018; Jones, Woods, and Guillaume 2016; Spence and Oades 2011). Even though a coach helps with
44
45 setting personal and professional development goals, the coachee is stimulated to be proactive in
46
47 attaining those goals, in both higher education and at the workplace, which relates to autonomy
48
49 support. Within higher education, Ragins and Kram (2007) have termed this sponsorship: sponsoring
50
51 or empowering the coachee in their advancement. Third, coaches offer relatedness support in both
52
53 contexts. Within higher education *psychosocial* and *psychological/emotional support* is offered,
54
55 which shows considerable overlap with *relatedness support* in workplace coaching. In higher
56
57 education, the psychosocial dimension of coaching is "built on trust, intimacy and interpersonal
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3 bonds in the relationship” (Ragins and Kram 2007, 5) and shows overlap with relatedness support as
4
5 far as building a healthy, supportive relationship between a coach at the workplace and an employee
6
7 (Bozer and Jones, 2018; Jones, Woods, and Guillaume 2016; Spence and Oades 2011). *Relatedness*
8
9 *support* overlaps with the psychological and emotional dimension of coaching in higher education, in
10
11 which a coach establishes a safe climate (Crisp and Cruz, 2009; Nora and Crisp, 2008).
12
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15 Although coaching models in higher education and at the workplace have their own
16
17 characteristics, careful investigation reveals several similarities. Coaching in both worlds have
18
19 competence development as their fundamental goal. Next, both groups of literature identify similar
20
21 support behaviours. They refer to relatedness and competence support to encourage students’ or
22
23 employees’ competence development. However, providing autonomy support was not mentioned in
24
25 higher education literature, but it was in the workplace literature. The biggest difference between
26
27 coaching in higher education and coaching at the workplace concerns the ‘who’ of coaching. While a
28
29 coach in higher education is required to be more experienced in terms of academic subject
30
31 knowledge or knowledge about the labour market, whether the coach is a faculty member or a peer,
32
33 this is not a requirement for coaching at the workplace, where a coach and coachee can be of equal
34
35 status (Bozer and Jones, 2018). Table 1 provides an integrative overview of the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘why’,
36
37 and ‘how’ of coaching in higher education and coaching at the workplace.
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42 [Table 1]
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46 **Method**

47
48 Semi-structured focus groups were used, which elicit interaction between participants where they
49
50 discuss concrete core competences of a transition coach (Morgan, 1996). This study will provide in-
51
52 depth understanding of how a transition coach can create the necessary support conditions for
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54 students.
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Participants

Two focus group sessions with coaches as participants were conducted in the Netherlands ($n = 4$) and in Belgium ($n = 5$) in October 2019. Participants were recruited from the researchers' networks and were selected based on their coaching experience either in higher education or at the workplace. Participants in the focus groups were coaches working as a coach in higher education ($n = 5$) or at the workplace ($n = 4$). These focus groups were mixed, with both coaches from higher education and coaches from the workplace as participants. In our sample, eight out of the nine participants (88%) were women. Participants' coaching experience ranged from less than 2 years of coaching experience (one participant) to more than 5 years of coaching experience (six participants). Ages varied from 31 to 55 years old ($M = 45.89$ years, $SD = 8.37$).

Procedure

The focus group sessions lasted approximately 2 hours each, were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim to facilitate the coding of the focus group discussions. The focus group sessions were chaired by an independent, experienced coach to mitigate the risk of interview bias, referring to the preconceived judgements of the researchers about the content of the focus groups. The focus group discussion guidelines were based on the theoretical framework, with open-ended questions about the who, what, why, and how of coaching for transition to the workplace (Bozer and Jones 2018; Crisp and Cruz 2009; Jones, Woods, and Guillaume 2016; Nora and Crisp 2008). The focus groups started out with more general questions about the goals of coaching and the tasks and responsibilities of coaches. Next, questions went into more detail about students' transition to the labour market, and how coaches can facilitate this transition. For example:

“What should a coach do to help students make the transition to the labour market?”

The six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used to code the focus group discussion transcripts deductively and inductively, on a semantic or explicit level, and on a

1
2
3 latent or interpretative level. To test the inter-rater reliability, the first author and an independent
4
5 peer researcher independently coded 10% of the focus group discussion transcripts. A satisfactory
6
7 Cohen's kappa of .80 was reached.
8
9

10 ***Analysis***

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13 The coded data from the focus groups were analysed using the thematic approach proposed by
14
15 Braun and Clarke (2006). Analysis of the results started with the core competences a transition coach
16
17 needs. Based on the data, these core competences could be categorized as the knowledge, attitudes,
18
19 and skills of a coach needed for supporting transition. Within the skills a transition coach needs, a
20
21 distinction was made between the three different types of support behaviours a coach should
22
23 provide: (1) *autonomy support*, (2) *competence support*, and (3) *relatedness support*.
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28 [Table 2]
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31 **Results**

32
33 The present studies used semi-structured focus groups to identify core competences of a transition
34
35 coach. The results are structured according to the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that together form
36
37 the core competences of a coach for transition.
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41 ***Coaching Competences***

42 ***Attitudes***

43
44
45 Participants in both focus groups identified a coach's professional attitude as pivotal for supporting
46
47 students' transition to the workplace. One participant defined a professional attitude as being
48
49 engaged and involved with the coachee, without being emotionally attached, while other
50
51 participants mentioned empathy as a core characteristic of a transition coach. During the coaching
52
53 conversation, the coachee is in a vulnerable position. However, not only the coachee, but also the
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55 coach should open up and be vulnerable themselves. Results indicate that, aside from opening up, a
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3 transition coach must be transparent, discreet, and have integrity, which facilitates the trusting
4 relationship between the coach and the coachee. Because coaching is based on a trust relationship, a
5 transition coach should be trustworthy and being able to build trust in a relatively short amount of
6
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8
9
10 time:

11
12 To be able to build trust in the very short timeframe. And that is ... If that trust ... people will
13 connect very quickly and can go very quickly to a personal level. And, not everyone can do
14 that, I see coaches who totally ... who stay on the surface. And, the effect [of coaching] is
15 much less if you have a superficial conversation. Or you will immediately go into that depth.
16
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21
22 So that is a characteristic of a coach that you really have to have. [Workplace coach - focus
23
24 group 2]

25
26
27 Further analysis indicated that a professional attitude for a transition coach includes having passion
28 for the coaching occupation, being curious and open-minded, but also knowing their own limitations,
29 for example:
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33
34 ...to refer people when there are questions that are outside your scope, outside your role or
35 outside your responsibility. [Workplace coach - focus group 1]
36
37

38 39 *Knowledge*

40
41
42 The primary responsibility of a transition coach is to prepare students for the labour market. Results
43 indicate that a transition coach should, therefore, have knowledge about the labour market itself, in
44 order to adequately prepare students for the transition. Should a student come to the coach with a
45 question outside the scope of the transition, the coach should refer the student to other
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47
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51
52 departments or institutions that can help the student with that particular question. In other words, a
53 transition coach should know their own limitations. Further results indicate that a coach should also
54 have knowledge about learning at the workplace and the coachee's learning processes and should
55
56
57 pay attention to the coachee's learning.
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Skills

The coaching skills mentioned by both focus groups could be divided into the three coaching dimensions defined earlier (relatedness support, competence support, and autonomy support).

Relatedness Support. A transition coach should provide relatedness support by creating a *safe environment* in order to freely discuss the fears and uncertainties of the coachee. Results indicate that in order to establish a safe environment, a transition coach should *actively listen* to the coachee and be able to manage the expectations of the coachee by *creating a mutual understanding* of the goals of the coaching sessions, as illustrated by one participant:

But students really come in and they say, 'Yes, I don't know whether I have to choose A or B. You are going to tell me what to choose.' I say, 'No, I'm not going to tell you that at all.'

[Higher education coach - focus group 1]

In addition, results indicate that to establish a safe environment, a transition coach should *build trust, create transparency* and *act discreetly*. Both focus groups identified building trust as pivotal for a safe coaching environment. Creating transparency and being discreet are especially important for transition coaching in a workplace context. At the workplace, other interests such as retention might play a role, which do not necessarily align with the goals of the coachee, who might plan to leave the company to seek opportunities elsewhere. It is important to agree on the goal of coaching, which refers to expectation management, and to be transparent about this with the coachee, and if necessary, with the manager or a third party. In addition, a coach can have multiple roles, for example, the role of supervisor, manager, or assessor. It is also pivotal to create transparency for the coachee on what role the coach is taking on. For example, one participant coaching at the workplace explained:

And I try to explain that too. I will consciously sometimes say, 'And now I will stand up as HR, and now I will stand up as [coach]. [Workplace coach - focus group 2]

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2
3 As for discretion, both focus groups identified creating confidentiality as a key component of a safe
4 environment. A transition coach should not discuss the coaching sessions with a third party,
5 especially in a work setting where different interests collide. Figure 1 summarizes the results
6 categorized as relatedness support.
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11
12 [Figure 1]

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14
15 *Competence Support.* Providing competence support involves helping the coachee set future (career)
16 goals and attain those goals. Both focus groups identified *stimulating the coachee's reflection* as a
17 key component for providing competence support. By stimulating reflection of coachees, they are
18 able to evaluate and adapt their own behaviour in the future. It is this reflection that enables
19 coachees to keep developing themselves. For example, one participant defined this process as:
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27 To think about it in such a way that you are able to find the solution to the problem yourself.
28

29 [Higher education coach - focus group 1]

30
31
32 Specific coaching behaviours to stimulate a coachee's reflection were identified during the focus
33 group discussions. Results suggest that a coach should start by providing *assistance with setting*
34 *(career) goals and assessing the abilities, strength, and weaknesses of the coachee.* By starting with
35 goal setting, the coach makes sure that the coaching conversation becomes goal oriented and
36 purposeful. Although assessment of the coachee's strength and weaknesses is the next step,
37 coaches in our focus groups agreed that the focus should be on the coachee's abilities, strengths, and
38 talents instead of the coachee's weaknesses. Based on the strengths, abilities, and talents of the
39 coachee, the goal can be adjusted. The next step is then *making an action plan* and working towards
40 goal attainment:
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53 We now know what your learning goals are and we can make the link. Okay, what are we
54 going to do now? We are going to work now. [Higher education coach - focus group 2]
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3 To make an action plan more concrete, steps to be taken towards goal attainment are identified.

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5 These smaller steps build on each other in order to reach the end goal, a process termed *scaffolding*.

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7 One participant used the term “chunking” for this, dividing your action plan into small concrete
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9 steps:

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12 By chunking. Taking small steps. Making bite-sized chunks. [Workplace coach - focus group 1]

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15 However, it is the coachee who works towards the goal themselves. The coach empowers the coachee
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17 and encourages proactive behaviour, termed *sponsorship*. In addition, the coach *provides a*

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19 *framework* for the action plan and the concrete steps to take. Even though it is the coachee who

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21 takes these steps themselves, the coach provides a range of support behaviours, including *guiding,*

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23 *explaining, showing, and advising*. The coach guides them through the action plan and explains the

24
25 different steps. The coach can show or demonstrate how to perform certain tasks. In our focus group

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27 discussions, showing or demonstrating was linked with on-the-job-training in the workplace context.

28
29 In addition to guiding, showing, and explaining, the coach sometimes gives advice to the coachee
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31 about which steps to take. One participant worded it:

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34 So you go through it with them, but in the end they also make decisions and steps. You

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37 merely give advice. [Higher education coach - focus group 1]

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40 Again, it is the coachee themselves who works towards goal attainment. However, together with the

41
42 coachee, the coach can *explore the possible paths* the coachee can take, the *possible solutions*. To

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44 support the coachee further in their goal attainment, the coach offers practical tools to the coachee;

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47 for example, in a workplace context this could be a list of unknown words or jargon.

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50 After concrete actions have been taken towards goal attainment, the coach can evaluate this
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52 behaviour together with the coachee by *asking open-ended, in-depth, and reflective questions*. Both

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54 focus groups identified *giving feedback* as a vital part of evaluating. Moreover, results suggest that a

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57 coach can help the coachee see the effect of his behaviour on others and his environment. One

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60 participant defined this as impact:

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3 You also have to see how it comes across to the outside world and what happens there. I call
4 that impact, what happens there, and how does it come back to you. [Focus group 2]
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8 Another coach from the same focus group related the impact on others to explicitly envisioning what
9 empathy means and putting yourself in others' shoes:
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13 When I say and do this, it comes across to the other person like that. So actually learning to
14 make empathy visible, learning to put yourself in the shoes of the other. [Higher education
15 coach - focus group 2]
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20 The results for competence support behaviours are summarized in Figure 2.
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23 [Figure 2]
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26 *Autonomy Support.* During the focus group discussions, empowering and encouraging proactive
27 behaviour by the coachee was frequently mentioned. The coachee is put at the centre of the
28 decision-making process, and the coach only guides, explains, shows how things are done, and
29 advises the coachee during this process. These concrete coaching behaviours also relate to providing
30 the coachee with autonomy support. By *handing over the responsibility* to the coachee and
31 *stimulating proactive behaviour* by the coachee, the coach stimulates the coachee's ownership of
32 their own development. A coach should make clear that it is the coachee who is in charge of their
33 own transition and career path, as illustrated by this quote from a participant: "You sit behind the
34 wheel of your own career path, your own job." [Higher education coach – focus group 2]
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47 Figure 3 summarizes the results found for providing autonomy support.
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50 [Figure 3]
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Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed at identifying the core competences of coaches who aim to support students in their school-to-work transition. By conducting semi-structured focus groups, the present study identified attitudes, knowledge and skills of a transition coach.

Coaching Competences

Results from the focus group discussions indicated that a transition coach possesses certain competences – attitudes, knowledge, and skills – to support students in their transition to the labour market. The attitudes of a transition coach closely relate to the skills, or support behaviours, a coach provides to facilitate students' transition to the labour market. These attitudes refer mainly to the interaction of the coach with the coachee; without the attitudes suggested by the underlying theoretical understanding of coaching, the coach will be unable to provide the coachee with the necessary support. Results further indicate that a transition coach has knowledge about the labour market and the workplace. Since the coach is preparing the student for their school-to-work transition, it seems plausible that the coach must be up-to-date on the requirements of the labour market, such as the generic competences required (e.g., Braun and Brachem 2015). Aside from the fact that a transition coach has a professional attitude towards the coaching process and knowledge of the labour market, the main findings of the present study provided support for our theoretical framework. The core competences of a transition coach can be categorized according to the three types of support: relatedness support, competence support, and autonomy support.

Relatedness support

First, a transition coach provides relatedness support and establishes a safe environment in which a coaching conversation can easily take place. This finding is in line with the study by Nora and Crisp (2008), who argued that coaching "must be conducted in a safe environment as perceived by the mentee" (p. 343). To establish a safe environment, a coach relies on several coaching behaviours, which Crisp and Cruz (2009) call psychosocial behaviours, referring to the quality of the coach-

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2
3 coachee relationship. Moreover, these psychosocial behaviours also relate to the attitudes of a
4 coach. A coach with a professional attitude, who is reliable and dependable, can create and build a
5 trusting relationship in a relatively short amount of time. Arguably, providing relatedness support is
6 closely connected to the professional attitude of a transition coach. A coach who values a personal
7 connection with the coachee and is empathic is able to create a safe environment where a coaching
8 conversation can take place.
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16 17 *Competence Support*

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20 Second, a transition coach provides *competence support*, in which they facilitate the decision-making
21 process of the coachee by stimulating the coachee's development and reflectiveness. When the
22 coach stimulates reflection, the coachee becomes a reflective learner, which allows the coachee to
23 critically analyse their own behaviour which, in turn, leads to behavioural change and personal and
24 professional growth (Beusaert *et al.*, 2015).
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32 Careful investigation of the behaviours associated with providing competence support
33 reveals strong parallels with the continuing professional development cycle proposed by Rouse
34 (2004). By setting personal or professional development goals, working towards attaining those
35 goals, and evaluating these experiences, a transition coach is able to stimulate the coachee's
36 reflection. This cycle consists of four phases: the reflective phase, the planning phase, the concrete
37 experience phase, and the evaluation phase. Concrete coaching behaviours are summarized in Figure
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48 [Figure 4]

51 *Autonomy Support*

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54 Finally, results of our focus groups indicate that it is the coachee themselves who takes steps towards
55 goal attainment and takes the initiative in the coaching conversation, while the coach provides the
56 necessary supporting conditions for the coachee to take these steps. Whilst stimulating proactive
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3 behaviour by the coachee is explicitly part of sponsoring within competence support, the results
4 suggest that stimulating proactive behaviour and ownership is not limited to a specific phase within
5 competence support, but rather for the whole coaching process. It is the coachee who decides about
6 goal setting, planning and taking concrete steps. By putting the coachee in the centre of the decision-
7 making process, the coach satisfies the coachee's need for autonomy.
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15 Interestingly, autonomy support was only defined as a support behaviour in the literature on
16 coaching at the workplace and not coaching in higher education. However, our focus groups
17 identified it as pivotal for transition coaching. Even though motivation theories, such as self-
18 determination theory (SDT), emphasize the importance of autonomy support for students' intrinsic
19 motivation (Niemic and Ryan, 2009), autonomy support has not been described as a specific
20 coaching behaviour in higher education. It can be argued that, as higher education provides a more
21 structured and autonomy-supportive learning environment than the workplace (Grosemans *et al.*,
22 2017), it is more important and up to the workplace coach to satisfy employees' need for autonomy.
23 In the more dynamic workplace, new employees have to take ownership over their own
24 development in order to cope with the constantly changing demands of the job (Grosemans *et al.*,
25 2017). It can therefore be argued that in order to adequately prepare students for the labour market,
26 students already need to learn to take responsibility and ownership over their own development in
27 the future.
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44 The present study has identified concrete coaching behaviours and competences that are
45 necessary for a coach to facilitate the transition from higher education to the labour market. Results
46 of our focus groups support our theoretical framework about coaching and provide in-depth
47 understanding of how a transition coach can establish the three supporting conditions necessary to
48 support students in their transition to the workplace (i.e., relatedness, competence, and autonomy
49 support). It could be argued that the coaching behaviours and competences identified are not only
50 relevant for a transition coach, but for all coaches, no matter the purpose of the coaching practice.
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3 Nevertheless, a specific requirement for a transition coach was identified as well, namely a transition
4 coach should have sufficient knowledge about the labour market. Knowing which competences are
5 required by the labour market allows the transition coach to steer the student in the right direction
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8 when formulating developmental goals and determining steps to take.
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12 Moreover, the lack of competences required by the labour market might be too narrow a
13 view of the problem of transition. The transition period is also accompanied by feelings of
14 uncertainty and a lack of motivation (Grosemans and Kyndt, 2017). The framework presented in this
15 study draws parallels with self-determination theory, a motivation theory, in which relatedness,
16 competence, and autonomy form the three basic needs of individuals (Ryan and Deci 1985; Spence
17 and Oades 2011). By providing the coachee with support for relatedness, competence, and
18 autonomy, a transition coach may also increase students' intrinsic motivation to take the first step
19 towards the labour market (Spence and Oades, 2011).
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30 31 ***Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research*** 32

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34 The sample of experienced coaches who specifically coach for transition was drawn from a small
35 population of coaches involved in the current project. Two focus group discussions were conducted,
36 and all data points in relation to our theoretical framework were satisfied. According to the criteria
37 proposed by Malterud *et al.* (2016), such as the aim of the study with its the theoretical foundation
38 and approach to the focus groups discussions and data analysis, we argue that our sample had
39 sufficient information power. We were able to offer concrete coaching competences for coaching
40 practice aimed at facilitating students' transition to the labour market. Participants in the focus
41 groups were coaches from higher education or the workplace with several years of experience,
42 ranging from less than 2 years of experience to more than 5 years of coaching experience. The
43 participants had all taken on the role of a coach for several years, but not all were officially certified
44 coaches. Due to the small sample size of the present study, future research is advised to collect
45 repeated measures.
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3 The present research presented core competences of a transition coach. However, empirical
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5 evidence on the effectiveness of a coaching practice aimed at facilitating students' transition to the
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7 labour market is still lacking. Therefore, our findings recommend evaluation of the effectiveness of
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9 these coaching competences in preparing students for their school-to-work transition. This calls for a
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11 more quantitative approach applying a longitudinal and experimental design, in which the effect of
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13 coaching on the school-to-work transition can be evaluated. In addition, coaching has always been a
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15 process involving interaction between two people, the coach and the coachee. It is assumed that by
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17 exhibiting the concrete coaching behaviours identified by the present study, transition coaches are
18
19 able to support students in their need for relatedness, competence, and autonomy. How this
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21 supportiveness is perceived by the student or coachee might give valuable insights into the
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23 effectiveness of these concrete coaching behaviours and in how to set up effective coaching
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25 practices aimed at facilitating students' transition to the labour market.
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30 Our findings suggest a range of competences that a transition coach must possess in order to
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32 facilitate students' transition to the labour market. Our results also indicated that the core
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34 competences of a transition coach show similarities with the competences of a professional coach
35
36 (i.e., providing relatedness, competence, and autonomy support (Spence and Oades, 2011). One of
37
38 the distinctive features of a transition coach consists of possessing knowledge about developments
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40 in the labour market; what are emerging fields, what are changing market needs, how do changes in
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42 the work call for adaptations in programs? Future research should look further into what kind of
43
44 labour market knowledge a transition coach should have to achieve optimal outcomes.
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49 *Implications*

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52 The present study provides concrete supporting conditions and behaviours for transition coaches on
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54 how to support students in their reflection and competence development. By setting goals with the
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56 student, guiding the student in their activity, giving feedback and asking open-ended questions,
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58 transition coaches create supporting conditions that foster students' reflection. In addition, it is
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3 important that it is the student who decides on the goals, makes an action plan and undertakes
4 activities. The coach merely guides the students in these activities. Furthermore, concrete coaching
5 behaviours are identified that help the coach build a safe coaching environment in which students
6 feel comfortable sharing their challenges, such as active listening and being discreet. Trainers can
7 incorporate these concrete behaviours in training programmes for novice coaches in higher
8 education.

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17 The present study also suggests that the supporting conditions and behaviours found are not
18 specific for transition coaches only, but are relevant for all coaches in higher education, regardless of
19 the purpose of coaching. Since coaching is one of the core tasks for teachers in higher education (van
20 Dijk *et al.*, 2020), the supporting conditions and coaching behaviours identified in this study can also
21 be incorporated in teacher training programmes.

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 **Conclusion**

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31
32 The present study identified various concrete competences transition coaches possesses, suggesting
33 that coaching can be a valuable pedagogical intervention to prepare students in their school-to-work
34 transition. Since coaching is already seen as a core task of academic teachers (van Dijk *et al.*, 2020),
35 we suggest that, with the focus on the labour market and knowledge about what is required by
36 employers, teachers in higher education can play a valuable role in fostering student's competence
37 development (i.e., by providing relatedness, competence, and autonomy support) and facilitating
38 students' transition to the labour market. Preparing graduates for their career on the future labour
39 market may in this respect also be considered as a coaching process becoming part of the regular
40 teacher roles of academic staff in higher education.

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3 Tables and Figures
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5 Table 1. An integrative overview of coaching in higher education and coaching at the workplace.
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	Coaching in higher education	Coaching at the workplace
Who?	Someone who is more experienced	Not necessarily someone with more experience
What?	A formal, structured process based on trust	A goal-oriented process based on trust and discretion
Why?	Student development - Promoting student success and personal and professional development - Competence development	Workforce development - Competence development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Cognitive outcomes o Affective outcomes o Skill-based outcomes
How?	Providing: - Career support - Psychosocial support - Psychological and emotional support	Providing: - Competence support - Relatedness support - Autonomy support

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Table 2. Coding matrix.

Code Groups	Descriptive codes (N**)	Description	Example quotes
Core characteristics*			
	Coaching competences* (N=13)	The competences - knowledge, skills, and attitudes - of a coach	"...so your professional attitude in the sense of you are involved, but not emotionally involved."
	Coaching experience* (N=2)	The experience being a coach in general.	"[Your] network and acquired experience - practical experience."
Coaching behaviours			
Relatedness support	Creating safe environment (N=8)	The coachee needs to feel safe in order to share his/her problems with the coach.	"So provide security."
	Listening (N=3)	A coach should actively and attentively listen to the coachee.	"I always try to listen to what I don't hear here. Yes. That is usually my context with which I start a coaching conversation."
	Creating trust (N=10)	Coaching is based on interpersonal process relations between the coach and the coachee. A coach should build a trusting relationship with the coachee.	"Create and build trust."
	Being transparent* (N=9)	Informing the coachee about the goal of coaching and your role as a coach and the goal of the coaching trajectory. If a coach has different roles, for example also the role of assessor, the coach should be open and explicit about this towards the coachee.	"And I try to explain that too. I will consciously sometimes say, 'And now I will stand up as HR, and now I will stand up as [coach].'"
	Being discreet* (N=10)	A coach should not discuss parts of the coaching conversation with a third party.	"I don't want my boss to know what we're discussing here."
	Expectations manager (N=6)	The coach discusses what the coachee can expect from the coaching trajectory.	"But students really come in and they say, 'yes I don't know whether I have to choose A or B, you are going to tell me what to choose.' I say, 'No, I'm not going to tell you that at all.'"
	Referring (N=1)	If it's outside your scope (e.g. psychological issues), the coach refers the coachee to other departments/institutions	"So to refer people when they ask questions that are outside your scope, outside your role, or outside your responsibility."
Competence support	Guiding* (N=8)	Assisting and steering the coachee in the process of goal attainment	"Yes, but you guide the process. You actually manage his learning process as a coach."
	Explaining* (N=1)	Making the process and goals clear and explaining how to do something	"Explaining the processes, I think."
	Showing* (N=2)	A coach can show or demonstrates the coachee how things are done	"That's also what I mean by training on the job. just sit down at the computer together and search for vacancies together."
	Sponsoring (N=5)	Sponsoring or empowering their advancement. Stimulating the coachee to be proactive	"What is not there yet, what I often do during coaching, is encouraging people to cross that threshold. Encourage people to overcome their cold water fears."
	Goal setting (N=7)	A coach helps you explore, identify, and set your learning goals	"You have to put the finger on the right note, [identify] the right learning goal."
	Help define action plan (N= 6)	After identifying the learning goals, the coach helps you to define actions and make a plan in order to attain those goals	"We now know what your learning goals are and we can make the link. Okay, what are we going to do now, we are going to work now."
	Supports scaffolding* (N=2)	The coach helps you to make those specific actions smaller	"By chunking. Small steps, chunking. Making bite-sized chunks"
	Giving advice* (N=2)	The coach gives the coachee recommendations about what he/she should or should not do	"For example, sometimes they just ask, how should I prepare a CV. Then it is really just pure advice."
	Exploring solutions* (N=3)	The coach and coachee explore numerous possibilities that can lead to accomplishing his/her goals	"How many possibilities are there now, and exploring them."
	Doing job simulation* (N=3)	The coach simulates job interviews and helps with writing a CV or application letter	"And yes, of course what we do a lot with students is job interview simulation."
	Offering tools* (N=5)	Offering practical tools, such as checklists or list of abbreviations used at the workplace	"And I think, actually what you both said... Because you do that by making it very concrete. Also with such a glossary."
	Offering a framework* (N=2)	The coach provides the coachee with a structure in which he/she can work towards the goals	"And also providing a framework, a framework with steps to take."
	Stimulating (self-) reflection (N=15)	The coach challenges the coachee to take different perspectives and stimulates the coachee to look at him/herself by holding up a mirror	"Learning them to hold up their own mirror."
	Asking questions* (N=7)	A coach stimulates reflection by asking concrete, practical, and open ended questions.	"Ask clarifying and in-depth questions."
	Giving feedback (N=2)	By giving ongoing feedback a coach can help stimulate reflection	"Then you also immediately give back to people if you notice something that does not help them."
	Evaluating one's own behaviour* (N=6)	The coach stimulates the coachee to evaluate his/her own behaviour in terms of the impact it has on others	"You also have to see how it comes across to the outside world and what happens there. I call that impact, what happens there, and how does it come back to you."
	Exploring feelings* (N=1)	Exploring how the coachee feels about his/her past experiences	"And also what do I experience here now. What do I feel now. Here and now, if I'm with you ... When it comes to not listening well, [...] How do you feel it with me now, for example."
	Assessment of strength and weaknesses (N=5)	"in-depth review and exploration of interests, abilities, ideas, and beliefs" (Nora & Crips, 2008, p.343). The coach stimulates analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the coachee	"Knowing you strengths and learn how to use them"
Autonomy support	Stimulating ownership* (N=13)	Encouraging coachees to take ownership of their personal and professional development. The coachee should take responsibility over his/her own learning process.	"Stimulating ownership"

Figure 1. Coaching behaviours for relatedness support.

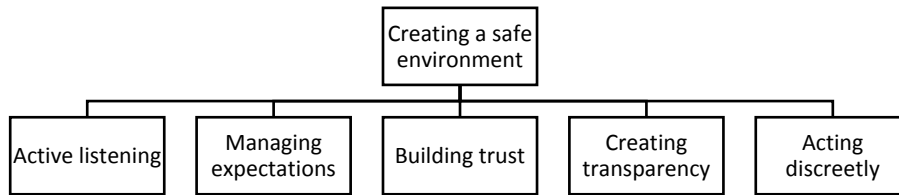


Figure 2. Coaching behaviours for competence support.

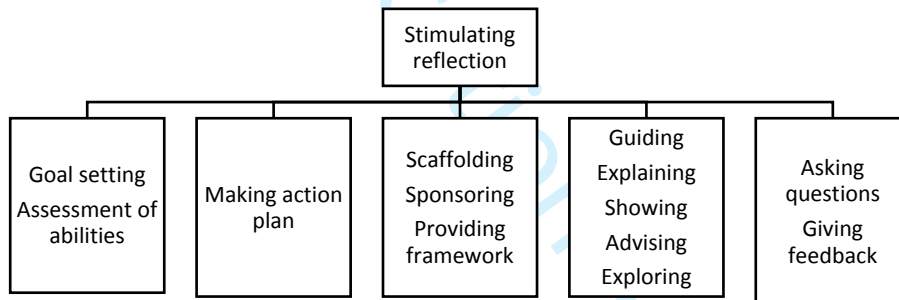
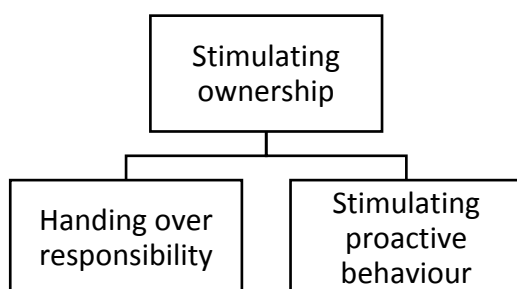


Figure 3. Coaching behaviours for autonomy support.



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Figure 4. Competence support cycle.

