

Contribution Framework 2.0

Achieving high performance one conversation at a time

Career Conversations



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The purpose of this toolkit

To support you in having quality career conversations with your staff to:-

- Enable you to help your staff feel more satisfied in their current role no matter what their ambitions
- Encourage staff to identify development opportunities and take steps that will help them and the organisation
- Have conversations that make staff want to stay with the organisation rather than go elsewhere
- Have a flexible approach which means that staff take ownership for their career development and don't look to you for all the answers



What is a Career Conversation?

A Career Conversation is an honest, open discussion between employee and manager that supports the employee in developing their career goals and plans for achieving what is mutually beneficial to individual and organisation. It isn't a single, one off conversation. It is a series of conversations designed to help answer the questions employees most care about: *Am I valued? What opportunities are there for me here? How can I progress? How do I get there?*



These two-way conversations are about supporting an individual to reflect and consider the skills and experience they have, the potential to grow within their current role, and any future aspirations they may have. It is not about developing their career goals for them. You should adopt a career coaching approach.

Supporting an individual to identify and utilise their potential is essential as it can result in them being:

- More energised and engaged
- Greater self-insights
- Set & achieve more realistic goals
- Perform better at work - and feel valued

As managers/coaches we are *accountable* for carrying out all the steps in the performance cycle; setting goals that weave in the Golden Thread so everyone understands how they contribute to Improving and Saving lives that truly stretch our staff, giving feedback to help them understand their progress and being honest with them when performance isn't at the level it should be. These conversations, though tricky, can help us remove obstacles that may be standing in the way of our staff development to allow and drive a culture of *continuous improvement*. It shows our staff how much we care about their progress, and how much we value growing and nurturing the talent we have within our organisation.

NCA Group Values underpin the behaviours needed for effective career conversations



The Career Conversation should ideally be employee-driven. They should take ownership of their development and seek your support, in helping them to fulfill their potential and seek opportunities. With well-informed, skilled individuals, you may have to do very little, apart from *listen*. With others, you may need to step in and give them a head start by adopting a confident coaching style, asking incisive questions and respond effectively to difficult issues or questions that arise. This guide will outline the structure and tools to help you have meaningful career conversations without any complex process or paperwork.

What gets in the way of us having Career Conversations?

Our own barriers



1. **You don't know** if it's important to them – so you don't bother
2. **You're overwhelmed** – Many managers are individual contributors *and* managers, or they have a huge team. Both cases make it easy to forget to make long term investments while fighting fires.
3. **It's not rewarded** – If your organisation doesn't measure or reward managers for growing their people, it won't be a priority.
4. **You don't know how** – It's common to be baptised in fire as a manager with no training. You may fear the conversation because no one ever had it with you.
5. **You're selfish** – Yes, some managers only care about themselves. You may only invest if there is a benefit for you.
6. **Not your job** – ownership should be with the individual so sees the responsibility with the individual – not your fault if they don't ask?!
7. **Fear of the unknown** - unsure of what opportunities there may be and therefore prefer to avoid the conversation about the unknown

The ever-changing landscape and workforce

The idea that managers and organisations can develop employees' careers is outdated. It may have been true once upon a time that employees would follow a predictable career path. But predictable career paths rely on static organisations. And in today's volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world (VUCA), organisations aren't static, they are continually changing.

For example:

- Increased pace in uncertainty and disruptions
- Flattened hierarchies
- complex virtual & matrix structures
- technological digital age
- more diverse workforce in every way
- dual-careers; part-time; flexible; job shares



All of this makes future planning more difficult. In the past, employers could take a 'Sat Nav' approach to their career development, simply following pre-programmed routes, designed by someone else, to well-travelled destinations. In today's VUCA world, career development is more like orienteering with the employee taking the lead on deciding where they want to go and how they're going to get there.

How can I make it easier to have Career Conversations?

Clear responsibilities

Understanding your role can often alleviate a lot of fear and be quite a relief that you don't have to be the font of all knowledge or sort out the perfect role for their more ambitious staff. The key is your ability to listen and ask great questions i.e. career coaching. Ultimately – the managers role is as a “catalyst” creating a process of alignment between organisational goals and activities and individual goals and activities.



Don't leave it to a once a year formal HR conversation

- A career conversation doesn't have to wait until the CF2 annual discussion
- Make it an ongoing dialogue - instigated by them or you.
- Start during the interview process - find out their aspirations, be realistic about the organisation approach - be honest – explain ownership and support. Make sure it's not just lip service. Don't overpromise.
- Bring it up at times in ongoing meetings - it can be really tempting to focus on task. You need to also make time for coaching, feedback, fixing problems, and their *growth opportunities*. Get to know them and whether they are career driven.

Understand the organisation approach to Careers

- Is there scope for small budget items to support individual growth e.g. can help pay for a local event or conference, buy you a book, purchase an online course, etc.
- Build networks - people often need support in navigating the processes and politics. You can help by introducing them to key contacts to help them build their own understanding
- Anticipate future opportunities: What training is available? Future openings and hiring plans that may fit their goals? Upcoming projects to get them to gain experience?
- Make sure they do the leg work though – you are the catalyst!

Be honest with yourself

- How committed are you to your *own career*? If you are not motivated to own, grow and develop your own career, how is this impacting your staff? Thinking about your own experience will help you to empathise with your staff, as well as give you some good reminders about the kinds of advice you can share.
- How much do you *care* about your staffs' development?
- Do you *pre-judge* and make *assumptions* about others aspirations? Remember, different people will have different career aspirations; let them explore theirs. Your role here is to *listen* not control or decide. Defer judgements.
- *Positive intent* - Never lose sight that career conversations are aimed at building, motivating and developing colleagues. Career conversations help open doors for career choices, build trust, and engage people to realise their potential within the NCA.

Preparation

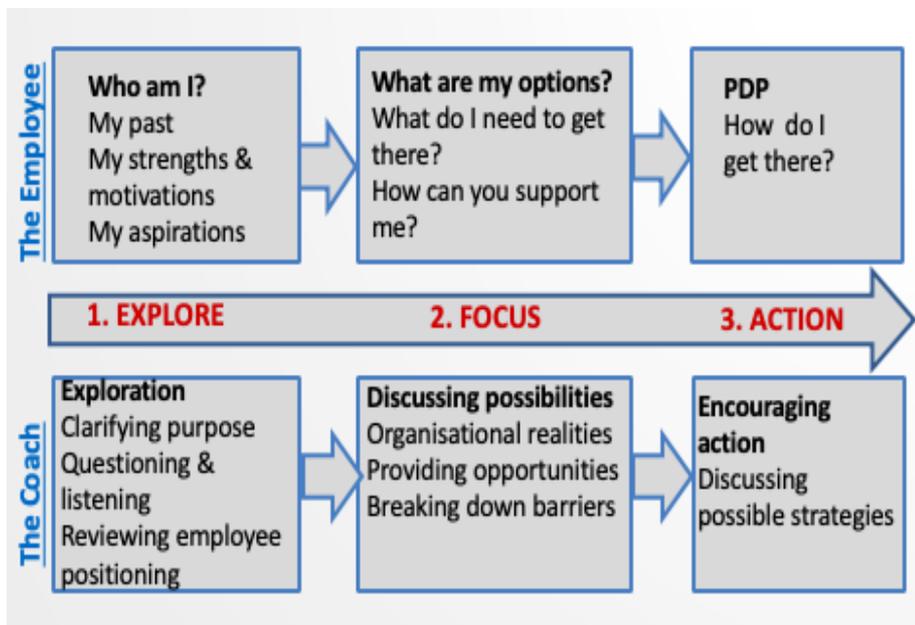
- Career conversations work best when both you and the employee prepare in advance. Encourage them to think about their aspirations and interests in advance
- Manage expectations - by emphasising they are responsible for managing their career. You are someone who can help them with this. Tell them in advance if there are any questions you want them to think about. Emphasise that the conversation is confidential.
- Ensure the meeting is held in a quiet space where you will not be distracted.

Personal Reflection

Reflect on your own career, could you have predicted you would end up where you are? Did you follow a predicted path given by your employer or your own aspirations?

What gets in your way of having an effective Career Conversation?
How confident are you in having a Career Conversation?

A Structure for Effective Career Conversations



Open

Agree the desired outcome from the conversation. Establish an open feel, putting them at their ease and showing interest. Be present, listen carefully and check you understand what they say to you. Explain the flow of the conversation you hope to have, with its 3 steps. Confirm your desire to help. Approach the conversation with enthusiasm and genuine curiosity. If you don't establish a trusting relationship they may feel unable to raise the subject of future roles for fear of retribution or disloyalty. They may resort to saying what they think you want to hear.

Encourage them to write things down as you go along - they need to own it!

Step 1: Explore

Too often we start by asking "what do you want to next?" But what really drives meaningful career development is discovering what matters to someone, and asking about their dream job is a great way to get at that. This question isn't meant to be solely pragmatic — if the answer is "I'd love to be a gardener," you don't necessarily need to start brainstorming development goals for a gardening career path. Instead, talking about someone's dream job can help you to get clues about someone's sense of purpose in life and their ultimate vision for their career.

Use powerful questions (see question bank) and listen to them. An important part of the conversation is to encourage them to talk openly to help them get to know themselves - their career history and any patterns; their likes and dislikes; their strengths and development areas. We often make the mistake of jumping straight to discussing a future "job". It should be much

Step 2: Focus

Help facilitate their thinking to establish what they want from work in the future.

Asking exploratory questions can be a powerful way to ground the career conversations in discovering what really matters to someone, so that they can work on exploring career paths that are truly meaningful. But remember that these questions are just a starting point — once you've gained a greater sense of what's important to someone, what their strengths and values and interests are, you'll still need to have a more practical conversation about what opportunities exist and what development activities to set goals around.

Encourage them not to put "all their eggs in one basket" and help them consider a number of career options - this way, if their preferred choice is unavailable they have other options to pursue. Ensure they see possibilities for growth beyond vertical movement. If they want to stay in the same role, reassure them that this is good and help them focus on how they can grow within the role and

continue to be motivated and stretched. This will then align with the usual performance discussions.

Use your knowledge to help them to look ahead - give them an honest and realistic picture of the organisation landscape. Are their preferred options realistic? Do they match their strengths and opportunities? What potential barriers may they face?

Step 3: Act

Help them create a meaningful development plan. Employees who create specific plans of action that are designed to help them grow professionally are more likely to stay and be satisfied. Your job is not to create the plans but to support them in achieving them. Do they need you to do anything for them? (e.g. connect them with key people).

Close

Review the discussion, agree follow-up actions and set a date to review progress.

More Tips for Success

Defer Judgements - do not shoe horn them into a role that is not suited to them or, even worse, not telling them when they aspire to a role that you/organisation does not think they are a good fit for, or even give false promises to avoid discussion

Give feedback - at various points in your conversation there may be an opportunity or need to give feedback. Research shows that people want to hear the truth about their strengths and development needs. When they don't hear the truth, they don't know what to change or what to repeat. However, they will respond better to feedback when trust is present and they feel you have their interests at heart. You may also take the opportunity to ask them for feedback, about how they like to work with you and what they need from you.

Share experience/knowledge - try to meet the individuals needs for information. Giving insights into your own career history may be helpful to them but make sure it is relevant and the focus stays on the individual

Develop your own self-awareness - you will gain confidence in holding career conversations if you are proactive and have clarity about your own career aspirations and plans.

Enable change in perspective - Challenge their thinking and aid their decision making. Help them move out of their comfort zone.

Anticipate Tough Questions There will always be some tough questions colleagues may throw at you. Prepare yourself for questions such as -

“Will my job be here tomorrow or in six months?”

“How can I possibly achieve my career goals in this climate?”

- **Tell the Truth** Don't pretend you know. Don't make up answers or make promises you can't keep. Talk about working together to get an answer. It's more important to anticipate the questions than have all the answers. The object is to create an honest and authentic dialogue.
- **Manage Expectations** The purpose of the meeting is *not* to make decisions or make promises on a future role and you need to make that clear. The aim is to explore their aspirations, listen and manage any unrealistic expectations they may have by explaining organisational realities.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Career Conversation Question Bank

When preparing for your career conversation with a staff member, use this bank to help you structure the conversation and really get to know the individual. Don't be prescriptive, try to be flexible and go with the flow. Be responsive to their answers to questions and don't try to shoe-horn them down a pre-conceived route. Your ability to do this will improve with practice.

Conversation Openers

- What would you like to gain from this conversation?
- How are you feeling regarding your current role?
- What do you enjoy doing most at work at the moment?
- What features of your current role do you like? Why?
- What have been the best times at work for you in the last year? Why?
- What are the core skills and competencies that you often get positive feedback about?
- What do you enjoy doing least at work? How would you like things to be different?
- What job changes have you made in your career so far and why?
- Which roles or parts of roles have you particularly enjoyed? What was it about them that made them enjoyable?

- How clear are you on your career goals? What would help you get clearer?
- What would be your dream job?

Exploring questions

- What do you see as your strengths? What would help you realise them more?
- What personal values would you like to be central to your career?
- How well do your strengths and values fit with your current role?
- What would you like to stop, or do less of, in your working life?
- What would increase your motivation and energy at work?
- What are the features that your future career must have?
- How would you describe your ideal career? - think about people, activities, environment, issues, challenges and results...

Identifying options

- How clear are you on your options currently? How could you get more clarification?
- What are the top three things that would make you choose one job over another?
- What are the top three things you'd like to avoid in any role?
- How could you shape your career to spend more time using your strengths and on the things you enjoy?
- If you have a role in mind, what is it about the role which excites or inspires you? What are you looking forward to? What concerns you about the role, if anything?
- What are the skills, competencies and experience that you need to develop based on your choices?
- If we forget about any barriers for a minute, what options come to mind for you?
- What kind of work would you like to be doing in three-five years' time?

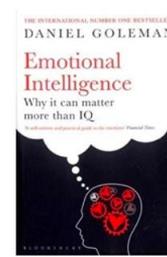
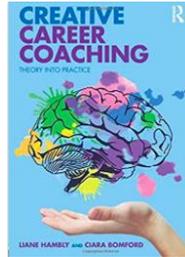
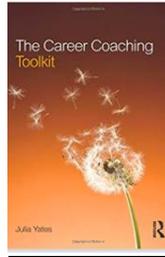
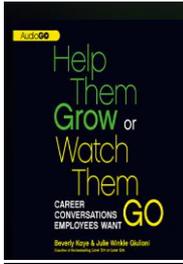
Agreeing actions

- What options do you want to follow up?
- How clear are you on the actions you need to take to achieve your career goals? What would help you gain more clarity?
- What's a realistic timeframe for those actions?
- What will be your quick wins?
- What support do you need from me/others?
- What barriers do you see? How will you prepare to overcome them?
- What's the first thing you are going to do?
- When will you want to review progress

Additional Resources

Further reading

Books



Personal Development Plan Template (from CF2 Annual Discussion form)

Section 4: Career & Development Review

- A. What are my career aspirations and ambitions?
- B. How do I aim to develop over the next 12 months? What is the focus for my professional development?

C. Personal Development Plan (PDP)

The PDP should take into account the demands of the year ahead as well as the individual's own growth/career ambitions and be based on the 70:20:10 model of development whereby 70 = on job learning : 20 = learning from others : 10 = formal learning

What	How	Why	When