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Career Conversations are most effective when conducted regularly with all employees. These are a particularly important step in effective talent management. The Guide[[1]](#footnote-1) to Career Conversations is divided by placement on the APS Nine-Box Grid which maps potential and performance on a matrix. More information can be found in the [**Talent Management Guide**](http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/current-publications/talent-management-guide/supporting-guidance/guide-to-career-conversations).

**Career Conversations as Coaching Conversations**

Career Conversations are most effective when run from a coaching mindset. The manager’s role is to ask questions to prompt consideration and reflection by the individual around their future aspirations and perceived development requirements.

Points to remember when in a coaching conversation are listed below:

* Coaching is about facilitating the performance, learning and development of another.
* You are not trying to ‘teach’ a person when coaching.
* A coach helps people to see opportunities for improvement and identify practical ways forward for themselves.
* A coach uses a blend of observation, talking, listening, questioning and reflecting with the coachee.
* The focus of the supervisor and manager is on enabling their staff to perform independently and to take personal responsibility for their own success.
* Supervisors and managers who coach well improve staff productivity, morale and job satisfaction.

Useful information on forming a development plan, with particular focus to on the job learning can be found in the publication [**'A guide to learning on the job in the APS’**](http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/current-publications/on-the-job-learning-good-practice-guide)**.**

Note: *these are guides only and can be tailored or expanded on as necessary to the specific conversation.*

| **Top Talent** *(High Performance, High Potential)* |
| --- |
| **Descriptor** | * Performs strongly, consistently delivering quality results.
* Demonstrates high potential for more senior/ complex roles.
* Potentially promotion ready now.
* Focus on recognition, engagement and retention (eg. high profile stretch assignments).
 |
| **Feedback** | * We consider you as broadly ready for more complex roles with greater responsibility.
* We would like to help you refine your skills.
* Your ambitions align with the future direction of the agency/APS and we would like to see you reach your potential.
* You are currently demonstrating many of the capabilities necessary for success at the next level. These include…
* The areas that may prove challenging for you at the next level are…
* We could like to develop a plan to develop these areas while focusing on your strengths iin preparation for your next role.
 |
| Questions | * What motivates you?
* What disengages you?
* Where do you see your career? – Next 12 months, 5 years, 10 years
* What do you regard the greatest risk to realising those goals?
* What experiences do you need in order to step into desired moves?
* How do you think you could gain this experience?
* Which of your personal styles assist you?
* Which of your personal styles hold you back?
* How do you think you are perceived within the broader organisation?
* Does that enhance or hinder your ability to achieve results?
* How strong do you consider your general management skills?
* What experience would strengthen this?
* How do you rate your leadership capability?
* How do you think your peers would rate your leadership capability?
* What experience could enhance this?
* Do you consider yourself a generalist or specialist?
* Is there any deeper technical understanding you need?
 |
| **Development Focus** | Learning on the job* Secondments to next level roles – either internal or external.
* Participate in a task force, project or assignment.
* Gain experience in an unfamiliar area at level.

Learning from others* Mentoring and sponsorship from a senior manager in your field or within an area of aspiration.

Formal learning* Talent development programs.
* Leadership development programs (internal or external).
 |
| **To Note** | * Consider activities to raise individual’s profile across the APS.
* Focus on maintaining engagement whilst understanding and responding to future development requirements.
 |

| **Emerging Potential***(Moderate Performance, High Potential)* |
| --- |
| **Definition** | * Generally performs well and demonstrates high potential.
* Likely to be promotion-ready in near future (next 2-3 years).
* Keen to learn and apply new skills.
* Target development to stretch performance and maintain engagement/ commitment to APS.
 |
| **Feedback** | * You have the potential to progress to higher and more complex roles in the future.
* Successful individuals at the next level have the following attributes…
* You are already demonstrating a number of these, including…
* Areas that may be focused on for development are…
 |
| **Questions** | * What motivates you and makes you feel valued at work?
* What gets in the way of good performance?
* What holds you back?
* What disengages you?
* What inspires you?
* Where do you see your career? – Next 12 months, 5 years, 10 years
* What do you regard the greatest risk to realising those goals?
* Do you think you are in the right role to realise your goals?
* What experiences do you need in order to step into desired roles?
* How do you think you could gain this experience?
* What support would you need from your manager/the organisation to make this happen?
* Which of your personal styles assist you?
* Which of your personal styles hold you back?
* How do you think you are perceived within the broader organisation?
* Does that enhance or hinder your ability to achieve results?
* How strong do you consider your general management skills?
* What experience would strengthen this?
* How do you rate your leadership capability?
* How do you think your peers would rate your leadership capability?
* What experience could enhance this?
* Do you consider yourself a generalist or specialist?
* Is there any deeper technical understanding you need?
 |
| **Development Focus** | On the job learning* Broaden experience through project work across a number of functions to better understand the organisation as a whole.
* Seek out new and different experiences via project work, challenges and secondments (internal and external).

Learning from others* Mentoring with someone who is successful at the next level.
* Shadow a high performer to understand uplift.

Formal learning* Leadership development programs (internal or external).
 |
| **To note** | * Be clear in discussion around what higher performance would look like in clear, specific and measurable goals.
* Focus on stretching performance – understand where interests lay and shape a project around this where possible.
 |

| **High Achiever***(High Performance, Moderate Potential)* |
| --- |
| **Definition** | * Performs strongly, consistently delivering quality results.
* Shows moderate potential for more senior/ complex roles.
* Demonstrates interest in learning and applying new skills when required.

Focus on enhancing potential and maintaining engagement/ commitment to APS. |
| **Feedback** | * You have the scope to take on broader roles.
* We are confident in your skills and ability to get things done.
* We would like to keep abreast of your aspirations should they change.
 |
| **Questions** | * What motivates you and makes you feel valued at work?
* What disengages you?
* What inspires you?
* Where do you see your career? – Next 12 months, 5 years, 10 years
* What do you regard the greatest risk to realising those goals?
* Do you think you are in the right role to realise your goals?
* What experiences do you need in order to step into desired roles?
* How do you think you could gain this experience?
* What support would you need from your manager/the organisation to make this happen?
* Which of your personal styles assist you?
* Which of your personal styles hold you back?
* How do your strengths fit with your current role?
* How do you think you are perceived within the broader organisation?
* Does that enhance or hinder your ability to achieve results?
* How strong do you consider your general management skills?
* What experience would strengthen this?
* How do you rate your leadership capability?
* How do you think your peers would rate your leadership capability?
* What experience could enhance this?
* Do you consider yourself a generalist or specialist?
* Is there any deeper technical understanding you need?
 |
| **Development Focus** | On the Job Learning* Work on live challenges (with teams from different functions) to gain experience and exposure.
* Discussion to understand preferred areas of interest and ways of working.
* Assign further projects in those areas to keep realising areas of potential.

Learning from Others* Participate in action learning groups with multi-disciplinary teams across agencies.
* Coach people with lower performance.
* 1-1 coaching with executive coach.
* Mentoring (role of mentor and/or mentee).

Formal Learning Options* Talent Development Programs (APSC).
* Leadership Development Programs (internal or external).
* Formal technical training.
 |
| **To note** | * Do not discuss any specific succession details (i.e. where the individual may sit on a succession plan).
* Focus on engagement and utilising current skills in other areas, as well as developing new skills.
* Consider role fit. Would a different role increase their potential for growth?
 |

| **Unrealised Potential** *(Low Performance, High Potential)* |
| --- |
| **Descriptors** | * Performing below expectations despite high potential.
* Keen to learn and apply new skills.
* Target development towards improving specific job performance or change job for better person-job fit.
* Regularly review progress with this individual.
 |
| **Feedback** | * (If working in a difficult situation) We acknowledge that you are working in a difficult situation and we have confidence in your ability.
* When you have managed the challenges in your current role, we are keen to support your potential growth into a larger role.
* Whilst you are facing these challenges, we would like to focus on how we can support you to bring the performance of your area up to the required level.
* (If not working in a difficult situation) We acknowledge that you have greater potential than your current performance indicates. What holds you back from achieving higher performance?
 |
| **Development Focus** | * Consider whether development would support better performance?
* Participate in an action learning group to learn through the experience of others.
* Manager coaching
* External mentor or coach
* Courses focused on change management and fundamentals of role.
 |
| **Questions** | * What motivates you?
* What makes you feel valued in the work place?
* What are your major challenges in the next year?
* Where do you think you will be in a year?
* What do you need in order to become more effective and how can we help?
* What additional support do you need from your team?
* What ambition do you have for the future?
* What have you learnt about yourself in your career so far?
* Are there any barriers preventing improved performance?
* What do we need to do to ensure optimum performance?
 |

| **Well Placed** *(Medium Performance, Medium Potential)* |
| --- |
| **Descriptors** | * Generally performs well and shows some potential.
* Demonstrates interest in learning and applying new skills when required.
* Target development to round out performance and maintain engagement.
 |
| **Feedback** | * You are a valued performer.
* We feel confident involving you in new initiatives due to your ability to help us with effective implementation.
* We think you have some potential to take on a bigger or more complex role sometime in the future.
* We would like to better understand your aspirations to ensure we are supporting you towards a role where you can contribute within an area that inspires you.
 |
| **Development Focus** | * Involve individual in a range of activities that help identify strengths.
* Increase involvement in implementation of new initiatives.
* Involve in change projects.
* Training to either extend technical skills or maintain practice requirements.
 |
| **Questions** | * What motivates you?
* What makes you feel valued in the work place?
* How do you see your career progressing?
* What do you feel your strengths are?
* How can we continue to build and develop these strengths?
* Is there anything preventing improved performance?
* Do you feel informed and involved in your team?
* What gets in the way of performance?
* Where do you see your career path and level of ambition?
* What could prevent you progressing?
 |

| **Proven Performer** *(High Performance, Low Potential)* |
| --- |
| **Descriptors** | * Performs strongly, consistently delivering results.
* Currently shows limited potential for more senior/ complex roles.
* Valuable contributor– focus on maintaining engagement, recognise/ reward contribution.
 |
| **Feedback** | * You are a highly valued proven performer.
* We are happy to have you as an experienced role model for others in your team.
* We value your positive influence and the impact this has in the workplace.
* Your strengths and abilities are well-aligned to the work you do.
* It is important to maintain your skills in the forefront of your area and we would like to focus on that in your development.
 |
| **Development Focus** | * Stretch skills to advanced levels in current area of speciality.
* Build coaching/influencing skills to help others build their capability in this area of specialty.
* Participate in projects or secondments to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives as a way of helping to own role even more effectively.
* Participate in action learning groups with multi-disciplinary teams from own or external agencies.
* Attend seminars and courses that provide breadth along with depth of skill.
 |
| **Questions** | * What motivates you?
* What makes you feel valued in the work place?
* What do we need to do to ensure continuous performance?
* Are you happy with what you are doing?
* How do you see your career progressing?
* What could prevent this progression?
* What derails your performance as a team member?
* What is your profile in the organisation and how could this be developed?
 |

| **Uncertain** *(Low Performance, Medium Potential)* |
| --- |
| **Descriptors** | * Performing below expectations but shows some potential.
* Provide candid feedback and ensure performance agreement is in place.
* Regularly review progress with individual.
 |
| **Feedback** | * Consider if they are in a new role and if so, acknowledge there will be a settling in period.
* You were selected to do this role because of…
* We saw future potential for…
 |
| **Development Focus** | * Focus on developing understanding of the role, particularly on the job learning through:
* Policies and manuals
* Teaching/reference aids
* Website.
* Work alongside highly engaged professionals to learn good practice and build networks.
* Coaching (particularly if in a new stretch role).
* Courses/training for skills specific to role.
 |
| **Questions** | * What motivates you?
* What makes you feel valued at work?
* How would you/others rate your performance at present?
* What standard of performance do you think you deliver?
* What do you require to enhance your performance and how can we support this?
* What do you consider your particular strengths? Are you using them in this role?
* What are your barriers to success?
* Where do you see your career path and ambition?
* What could prevent you progressing?
 |

| **Solid Contributor** *(Medium Performance, Low Potential)* |
| --- |
| **Descriptors** | * Generally performs well, although potential is limited.
* Shows limited interest in learning new skills.
* Target development to round out performance and enhance adaptability.
 |
| **Feedback** | * You are considered to be responsive to changing organisational work practices and organisational direction.
* Your strengths and abilities appear to be well aligned with your current role.
* We appreciate that you sometimes go out of your way to put in extra efforts even when it isn’t expected of you.
 |
| **Development Focus** | * Projects aligned with strengths and abilities to broaden knowledge.
* Explore new and different types of work within current role scope that keeps the individual interested and motivated.
* Work alongside highly engaged deep professionals to gain additional insights and knowledge share.
* Courses to extend technical skills or keep up with practice requirements.
 |
| **Questions** | * What motivates you?
* What makes you feel valued at work?
* What areas of skills and knowledge do you feel need developing in order to improve your current performance?
* Are there any issues preventing you from performing at an even higher level?
* How do you see your career progressing?
* How would you like to achieve this?
* What are you strengths and how can we utilise them better?
* How might the organisation better utilise your skills and experience?
 |

| **Strongest Concern** *(Low Performance, Low Potential)* |
| --- |
| **Descriptors** | * Performing below expectations coupled with low potential.
* Ensure performance agreement is in place and regular/candid feedback is provided and documented.
* Formal exit may be required.
 |
| **Feedback** | * We’d like to see your performance increase as we believe it can.
* Let’s talk about what prevents you from higher performance and what needs to change in order to shift that.
 |
| **Development Focus** | * Provide regular feedback.
* Relevant training in core requirements of the role.
* Support to assist individual to identify and move to a role of greater fit (where initiated by the individual).
 |
| **Questions** | * What motivates you to come to work and feel valued?
* Is something missing?
* How do you feel about your current performance and behaviours in role?
* What factors have affected the present situation?
* What are your strengths? Are they aligned to the role?
* How can we support you to improve your performance?
* Do you wish to develop? What are you barriers to success?
 |

1. Conversation guides drawn from information provided by the New Zealand Government Leadership Development Centre. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)