

Talking about talent

A guide to using the Talent Management Conversation Tool

This document complements the **Talking About Potential** guide, and focuses specifically on talent. This guide is designed to help our valued people have great conversations about talent, so that we have the right people in the right roles, and can give the right opportunities and support. It's written with both managers and staff in mind, with an appendix containing further information for managers.



Are you making the most of your talent?

Use this grid to talk about the value you bring and how to make the most of it.

Through conversation with your manager, decide where you're placed on the grid, by considering:

- What you're achieving (performance)
- How you're achieving it (behaviours)
- Your readiness to move on in your career

We all naturally move around on this grid over time. If you move into the green category, it may mean you're ready to join our leadership programmes.

This is a great chance to share with your manager your reflections about the difference you're making now, what you do best, what's holding you back, where you want to be and how we can help you get there.

Readiness to move	Professional talent	Developing talent, ready soon	Ready now
Performance and behaviours Exceeds expectations Outstanding performance against objectives, achieves more than what is expected of them, and demonstrates role modelling of behaviours required beyond their role.	Professional in field Shows promise to continue to advance in their professional field or into a wider leadership role within 3–5 years if they have the capacity and ambition to do so, but equally valuable where they are. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High performance in own field. • Role models behaviours of organisation/role. • Consistent results and brings added value to tasks given • Possible reached 'expert' stage in their career. • Shows upward potential, but less ambition, likely to move on in the medium future, outside of own specialism. • Emergent wider skills. 	Developing talent, ready soon Demonstrates the potential, ambition and motivation to develop at their current level and potentially progress in their career within 1–3 years into new and wider challenges. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High performance with consistency of results across a variety of assignments and brings added value to tasks given. • Acts wider than professional background. • Role models behaviours of organisation/role. • Low-moderate potential/ambition to move on, possibly happy to stay in current position. • Secondary pool to fill critical positions; perhaps move one level; likely to shift to key of high professional roles over time. 	Ready now Demonstrates the potential, ambition, motivation and experience to perform at the next level now or within the next 12 months into new and wider challenges. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A role model with the highest levels of performance, potential and ambition to move on. • High performer, bringing added value to assignments with lots of potential and capacity for immediate advancement. • Role models behaviours of organisation/role. • Demonstrates mastery of current assignment. • True organisation asset – role model. • First call to fill critical positions.
Meets expectations Meets the expectations for performance against objectives and behaviours required at the level for their role.	Future professional in field Good reliable performance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaves professionally in line with role. • Showing upward potential but less ambitious to move outside of field. 	Solid generalist (Solid/adaptable) Good rounded performance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaves professionally in line with role. • Meets expectations. • Works wider than professional background. • Some potential to do more in long term if ambition and development allows. 	Future emergent potential (Capacity for key roles) Individual with high potential. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good rounded performance. • Behaves professionally in line with role. • Has the capacity to be a consistent talent, or with stretch move to higher levels.
Partially met expectations Below 'met expectations' against performance objectives and behaviours required at the level for their role.	Developing professional (Needs stretching) Current low demonstration of performance and behaviours required of role. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being supported to reach their potential. • May be in the wrong role. 	Developing generalist (Needs stretching) Low performance but showing moderate potential over time outside of professional role. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being supported, needs pushing and stretching to reach full potential. • May be bored, under-used or in the wrong role. 	Transition employee (New to role, needs support) New to post or assignment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have yet to demonstrate results, or high potential in a new position / development assignment. • Future performance will allow assessment of where they align to the grid longer term.

What to expect

Sitting down with your manager and using this tool in your conversation will help you make the most of your talent and reach the right decisions about your next move.

It's worth taking time to prepare for the conversation, so that you come away with a clear sense of direction, and your manager is able to give you the right support over time. Here's what you can expect to happen:

You or your manager arranges the first conversation.

Prepare by reading through these guidelines and thinking about examples of your work that will help place you on the model. It might be good to jot these down.

Expect it to be a positive, friendly, open and encouraging conversation. Your manager is likely to ask questions such as:

- What made you choose your current role?
- What kind of role are you aiming for in the future?
- What do you see as your strengths?
- What motivates you, and what makes you feel valued?
- What kinds of challenges do you face?
- What could be done to help you achieve more?

Your manager may follow up by signposting you towards suitable development opportunities, or you may identify these yourself.

You both continue this conversation over time. Keep talking with your manager, who can provide ongoing support, advice and feedback.



“There are no right or wrong places to be on the grid —the most important thing is the quality of the conversation and the insights you gain.”

Finding your place on the grid

During the talent conversation your manager will help you decide where you're placed, by agreeing a rating for performance (towards better results) and behaviour (towards better ways of working).

How to rate performance

Use the descriptions below to decide the level which most closely reflects your current performance:

Rating	What does it look like?
Partly meets expectations	You can show evidence that you've met some, but not all of the objectives, tasks or responsibilities you've been set.
Meets expectations	You can give clear evidence of how you are meeting the objectives, tasks and responsibilities set for your role — for example, completing a project or providing a service. You're able to deliver tasks and meet objectives and responsibilities with little, if any supervision. You sometimes go unnoticed in doing this, but you are recognised among your colleagues as a reliable person who will get things done.
Exceeds expectations	You can give clear evidence of how you are not only meeting the objectives, tasks and responsibilities set for your role, but going further, achieving more and adding your own individual touch. You only need to be given the vision or expectations of what needs to be achieved, and you do the rest. You're one of the high-impact people that others go to when they need something achieved with creative flare and added value.

How to rate behaviour

This may feel a little less clear-cut than measuring performance. You'll need to make a balanced assessment of how you act e.g. based on your organisation's agreed values and associated behaviours. Your manager will help by sharing their observations.

The two most common approaches for this are:

A review as part of your conversation

Talk through and seek mutual agreement on the level that most closely matches your current attainment

A review using a 360 degree feedback tool

i.e. the Healthcare Leadership Model
You can find out more about the model at

leadershipacademy.nhs.uk/leadershipmodel

Your manager will explain the chosen approach and work through it with you.

Appendix

Notes for managers

Here you'll find practical advice on how to make sure you and your staff get the most out of the conversation, and what you can do to provide great talent management.



Appendix: notes for managers

Making the most of the conversation

1. Create the right environment from the start

Create a sense of occasion - this is a really positive way to help bring out the best in everyone in your team.

Agree the aims of conversation — to maximise performance by having open honest dialogue about performance, behaviours and aspirations.

Agree precisely what you both want to achieve by the end of the conversation e.g. to identify a pathway to leadership, or clear steps for development.

Reaffirm that this is a two-way process.

2. Enable understanding and insight

Value and respect the different approaches, ideas and perspectives your team member brings.

Use coaching questions to encourage knowledge and values to surface. Give time to reflect.

3. Reach conclusions and finish in agreement

Acknowledge the insights and conclusions you've gained together.

Summarise and agree specific actions.

Close the conversation on a positive note.



Appendix: notes for managers

Selected coaching questions to support the conversation

Here are some questions you can use to help decide where the person you're talking to sits on the grid, and what kind of support they're going to need.

You'll find a more detailed list of questions organised by grid area at:

<https://www.leadershipacademy.nhs.uk/resources/talent-management-hub/>

- What made you make the move to this job? How does it fit into your career path?
- What kind of strengths and experience do you bring to this role?
- Can you describe any feedback you have had since starting your post? What does this mean?
- What do you like about the job you do? What don't you like? Why?
- What motivates you and keeps you engaged? What makes you feel valued?
- What ideas and opportunities have you identified to make your role even better? How can we develop these further?
- What support do you need from me, the team or organisation to help you reach your full potential in your role?
- Who has been helping you out since you started in role? How has it helped? Who else can help?
- Where do you want to be in three years time? What are your aspirations? What would it feel like?
- What can you offer back? Can you develop others? How can you share and pass on your knowledge, skills and expertise?
- What happens to our team if you leave? What do we need to do to fill any gap you may leave?
- What could be the barriers to achieving your aspirations, and how can we overcome these?
- Has anything happened that could affect how you perform / behave at work?
- What appeals to you more: a leadership role, or developing your technical expertise?

Appendix: notes for managers

Things to be aware of

✓ Do:

Use a coaching-style conversation drawing on listening and empathy skills to explore the bigger picture and aspirations.

Use factual observations not judgements. Consider evidence available e.g. 360 feedback, wider feedback and evidence of performance, outcomes, and competency achievements to give you a rounded picture.

Be honest, transparent, constructive and clear. Be respectful and supportive too.

Actively listen, observing body language, tone and also what is not said.

Be constructive, building on ideas and perspectives that come up in conversation.

Identify their key strengths and how to draw on these in their current role, or their next.

See any development areas as a positive way to reach full potential.

Think about behaviour just as much as skills and performance – it's not just what we achieve but how we do it.

Summarise the discussion, agree action points and finish positively.

Make sure you hold talent conversations with all your team, regardless of role.

Respect and value the different ways your team members may approach things.

Use this time to appreciate their strengths and unlock hidden talents.

✗ Don't:

Do all the talking

Make personal judgements or assumptions

Use this as an opportunity to blame

Force your views onto the individual

Become emotional or aggressive

Only focus on weakness

See development areas as failure

Rush the conversation

Avoid difficult topics

Appendix: notes for managers

Using evidence-based options for rating behaviour

1. Behavioural Framework - your organisation may already have a framework to help your team members explore how they behave. Alternatively, you could create one, which could look like this:

Organisational behaviours	Rating 1 - Partially meets 2 - Meets 3 - Exceeds	Comments and examples (Individual, peers, reports, manager, others)
e.g. Treating colleagues with respect	2	Demonstrates consistent behaviour in treating colleagues with respect and support

2. Another option is to undertake a 360 degree review. You can find further information [here](#) or on page 14 of our [Guidelines for using the Healthcare Leadership Model](#).

Appendix: notes for managers

After the conversation

Documenting and follow up

It's really important that the talent conversation is an ongoing one and that any actions you or your team member have committed to are followed up. You'll have talked about development, whether that means helping them continue doing a good job, addressing specific needs or tapping into potential talents to prepare them for their next role.

Now work needs to be undertaken to support and encourage that. Either during the conversation or in a follow-up, you'll have agreed on the development needed to help your team member maximise their potential. These should be documented, enacted, monitored and evaluated on an on-going basis. Your organisational learning and development teams can help you understand the development needs of your staff if needed.

Consistency checking and removing bias

If you're undertaking Maximising Potential Discussions for whole teams, it is also good practice to discuss and de-brief the discussions and outcome against those with other peers/managers. This helps to remove any bias and make sure everyone in the team is treated equitably, and also allows peer support between managers.

Use confidential spaces such as senior team meetings to discuss the process and their outcomes and why you both reached these conclusions. This will help give consistency in how the team is rated. It also allows open and transparent discussions around maximising potential, linking to talent activities such as succession planning.

Appendix: notes for managers

Development interventions

Here are some ways in which you can give support as part of an ongoing development plan.

You'll find a more detailed list of interventions organised by grid area at:
<https://www.leadershipacademy.nhs.uk/resources/talent-management-hub/>

Leadership development for those in green areas of the grid:

- NHS Leadership Academy professional leadership programmes
- Local organisation leadership development programmes

General development across green and purple areas of the grid:

- 360 degree feedback and self-awareness exercises
- Coaching, mentoring and further education
- Placements, secondments or assignments beyond normal role

Specific development for those in turquoise areas of the grid:

- Realistic management of expectations
- Career review, guidance and counselling
- Feedback and support focused on particular skills and behaviours