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Future Skills Centre

Workplace Learning and Career Navigation Tools

Performance Conversations

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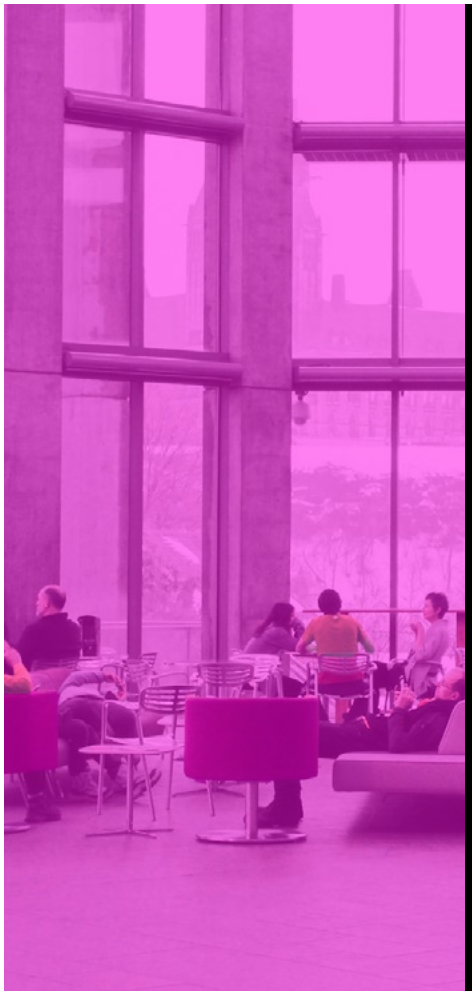
Managers, Human resources team member or occupational health and safety representative



Future Skills Centre

The Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures (FSC-CCF) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead.

The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada.

If you would like to learn more about this report and other skills research from FSC, visit us at fsc-ccf.ca or contact info@fsc-ccf.ca.

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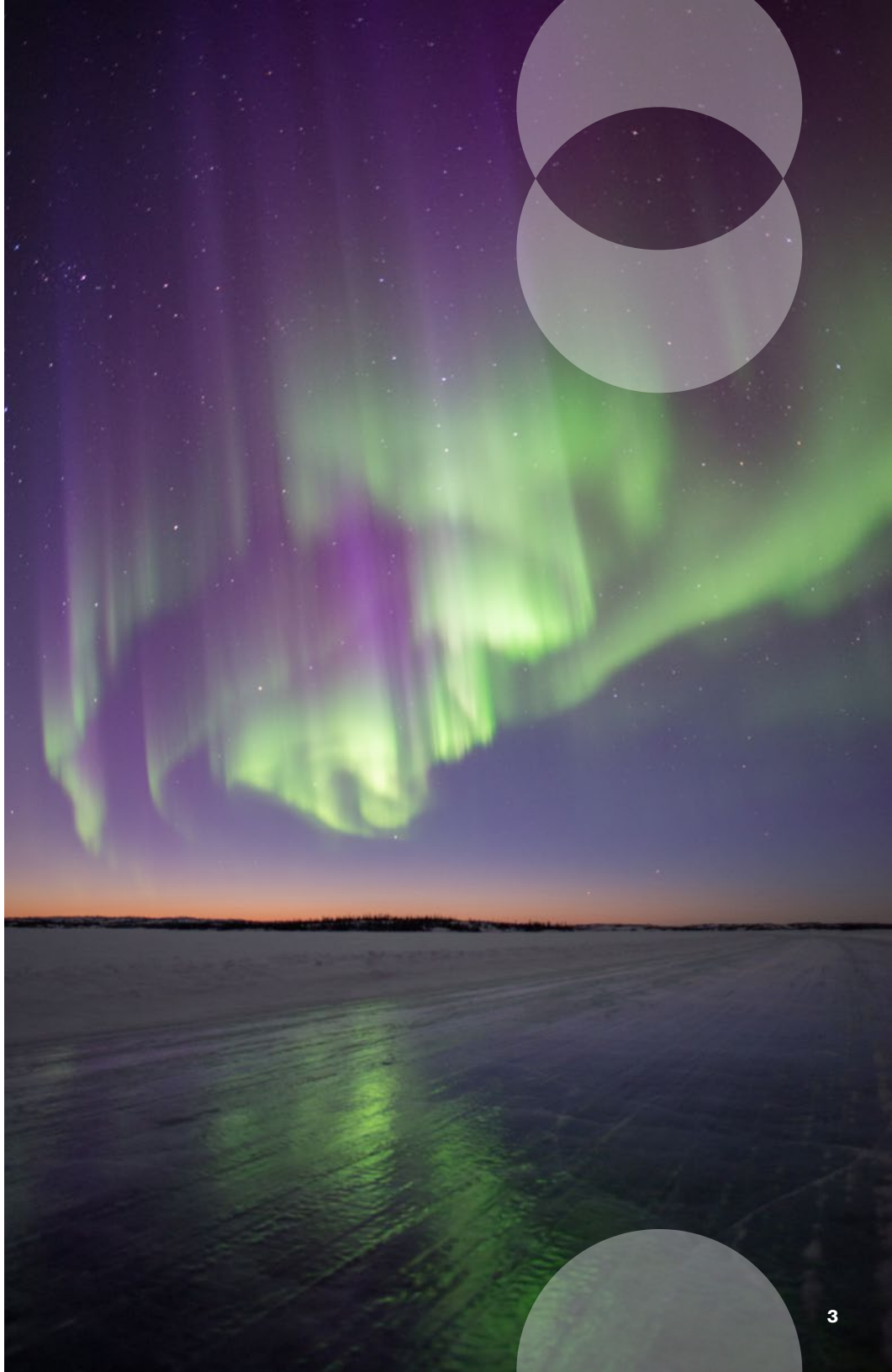
Key terms

inuuqatigiitsiarniq: “Respecting others, relationships and caring for people.”[1]

tunnganarniq: “Fostering good spirits by being open, welcoming and inclusive.”[2]

Two-Eyed Seeing: A Mi’kmaq principle about learning to see the world from multiple perspectives.



1 Government of Nunavut, *Public Service Annual Report 2020–21*, 4.
2 Ibid.

Checking in

Performance conversations are an important tool to help managers align an employee with the role, job classification, and desired outcomes. Having open dialogue with employees about expectations and performance can reduce misunderstandings, build trust, and lead to clear next steps.[3]

Performance conversations:

- are strengths-based—appreciate what's working while providing opportunities for growth.
- use a coaching approach—listen actively and collaborate to find solutions and areas for improvement.
- are learning opportunities—employees and managers can learn something new.[4]

Examine your company's performance management process. Is frequent feedback part of your practice?

Frequent feedback leaves little room for surprises during formal evaluation discussions. Checking in regularly provides more opportunities to gauge progress toward goals and development milestones and can create space for troubleshooting, status updates, and everyday conversations to build trust. Feedback also shouldn't be limited or wait until the scheduled time. It can be more impactful to provide feedback in the moment.

Performance conversations involve establishing the purpose of the meeting, building trust, celebrating successes, reflecting, and making plans with clear next steps. They include three main phases: preparation, conversation, and reflection.[5]

3 GenerationOne, *Everybody's Business*.
4 UBC Human Resources, "Performance Conversations."
5 Ibid.

Performance conversation guide

Phase 1: Preparation

Co-create: Establish intent and purpose

The performance conversation is an opportunity for learning and growth. Both the manager and employee should prepare. For managers, this list of self-directed questions can help you prepare:

- How much time do you want to dedicate to this conversation?
- What feedback do you want to share?
- Will you meet in person or in a virtual meeting, and how does this change your preparation?
- Have you gathered performance input from Inuit support personnel or mentors? How does this change, influence, or confirm your ideas about the employee's performance?
- How well do you know the employee's community? Network?
- Do you know the challenges they face?
- How does the employee show leadership within their team? Outside of work?
- How do they demonstrate company values in and outside of work?
- How has the employee grown since the last performance conversation? Have they met their goals? If yes, has this been formally acknowledged? If not, are you aware of any extenuating circumstances that prevented achievement?
- Are there areas that could use more attention?

Reviewing performance outcomes alongside goals and expectations provides the chance to celebrate accomplishments. Given the emphasis on community well-being in Inuit culture, supervisors may wish to highlight outcomes that affected others. This is also a chance to reflect on development and actual versus desired outcomes.

Ask your employee to prepare by considering some of the following questions. Some employees may find this exercise uncomfortable or challenging, but positive reinforcement and clearly communicating the benefit of this step may help. Reassure employees that they do not need to respond to each question. These are simply a guide to help you both come prepared to have a meaningful conversation:

- What would make this meaningful for you?
- How much time do you want to dedicate to this conversation?
- What areas of your role are you hoping you'll receive feedback about?
- What would you like to share with your manager about the workplace or your well-being?
- Which technical achievements are you most proud of?
- Which collaborations and team achievements are you most proud of?
- What challenges or bottlenecks are you coming up against? Would you like any support to help manage them?

- How are you making progress toward your career and performance goals?
- How do you demonstrate values that align with the company's mission in and outside of work?
- What would help you become even more effective in your role?

Preparing notes before the meeting helps set an agenda for the discussion. The meeting will be more focused and organized if both parties come prepared. Preparation can also ease discomfort, especially if there are sensitive issues to address.

Phase 2: Conversation

Connect: Build trust and safety

Set aside a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting to confirm the purpose of the meeting. Don't forget to outline desired outcomes for both the manager and the employee. The type of performance discussion will determine the purpose. Is this a new performance plan with your employee? Is this an end-of-year review? Or is this a regular check-in? Both parties understanding the focus will establish clear expectations and transparency.

inuuqatigiitsiarniq means "respecting others, relationships and caring for people".[6] Connecting with employees allows managers to build and sustain meaningful, respectful working relationships. As a manager, you can support this relationship by getting to know your employees at work and learning about their communities. This will help you understand any challenges with work-life balance that employees face.

Remember, each relationship is different, and relationships evolve. Building relationships and getting to know employees well requires frequent check-ins.

Consider starting the conversation with:

- Thank you for taking the time to prepare for this conversation. I look forward sharing feedback and talking about how things are going for you in your role, your goals, and achievements.
- How can I help make this conversation a success?

6 Government of Nunavut, *Public Service Annual Report 2020–21*, 4.

Celebrate: Acknowledge skills and community impact

tunnganarniq is the Inuit Societal Value about "fostering good spirits by being open, welcoming and inclusive".[7] Set the tone of the conversation by beginning with successes and strengths. Identify areas you feel the employee has excelled in. The following are a list of things to consider here:

- Have they met their agreed-upon goals?
- Have they exceeded expectations in any areas?
- What are some of their strengths?
- Would you like to see them build on these strengths in any way? Can you offer training and development to help them achieve this?

Invite employees to identify areas they are proud of, both at work and in their community. Cultural awareness is integral to this process.

Are there ways community successes and strengths can support their work? Can you see examples of how they transfer these competencies to the workplace?

Identifying employee strengths is an important step. Actively listening to your employee's views of their achievements is also important. And this provides a natural segue into the next stage of the conversation.

Collaborate: Discover options and possibilities

Open communication is key, but it can be difficult.

inuuqatigiitsiarniq ("respecting others, relationships, and caring for people"[8]) and tunnganarniq ("fostering good spirits by being open, welcoming and inclusive"[9]) are important values to reflect on. They can help us understand the challenges that employees may face, especially if they are away from home. Our research found that employee manuals, such as those at Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and the Government of Nunavut, commonly featured annual performance reviews that address achievements, career planning, and areas for improvement.[10]

Do not avoid performance issues. Inuit culture is based around the whole community maintaining peace and order.[11] In fact, it may be most culturally appropriate to hold regular group discussions around performance, empowering all team members to discuss challenges and opportunities and arrive at group decisions. This aligns with agile frameworks, for example Scrum,[12] which promote self-organizing teams who choose as a group how to accomplish a given outcome. Group accountability mechanisms could be a useful tool to use in tandem with regular performance conversations.

Some organizations will require annual manager-employee performance conversations in their policies. Sensitivity and empathy can help when giving criticism—view the situation as restoring balance,[13] rather than one of punishment.

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Human Resources Manual (Also Known as Personnel Policy Manual); Government of Nunavut, "Collective Agreement."
11 Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, *The Inuit Way: A Guide to Inuit Culture*, 9, 30.
12 Clementino Mendonca, "About Self-Organizing Teams."
13 Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, *The Inuit Way: A Guide to Inuit Culture*, 9.

Show genuine interest in your employee's well-being and motivations. Be aware that contextual factors, such as family responsibilities or housing insecurity, can affect their performance at work. (See our ***Systems and Structures*** tool for more. Cultural differences in emotional reactions and body language can create misunderstandings. Where possible, engage other Inuit staff to help you navigate communication challenges.

Explain the consequences of performance issues and how they impact colleagues, the company, and clients. What is the employee's side of the story? Practise active listening and Two-Eyed Seeing, which means viewing the world from multiple perspectives. This can help you to understand the problem and develop a solution together. Then, provide consistent guidance and acknowledge improvements.

There are conversation prompts you can use to get started in the conversations:

- I have noticed some bottlenecks or challenges you might be coming up against. Can we talk about potential solutions?
- Let's look at the outcomes we discussed when we met last and see how things are progressing. What is working well for you?
- Your well-being is important to me. Would you like to talk about that today?

Cultivate: Determine a plan

In this stage, managers partner with employees to identify what was learned, next steps, and how you will provide feedback on an ongoing basis.

- What has been the most valuable part or outcome of the discussion?
- How can I best support your performance and help you succeed?
- Here are the next steps we've arrived at from this conversation. Are there any you would like to add?
- Is there anything that we should schedule a follow-up meeting to talk about?
- I recognize that things can come up or get in the way of goals. How can I best support you if this happens? Let's plan to adjust milestones and timelines as soon as we identify challenges.

Phase 3: Reflection

Contemplate: Understanding for self-development

Managers and employees should both reflect on how the performance conversation unfolded and their own conversational skills. Take this time to reflect on self-development and encourage your employee to do the same.

- I most appreciated ... about our meeting.
- Through this conversation, what I learned was ...
- The aspects of the conversation that were challenging were ...
- The way I like to learn is ...
- If I were to do it differently next time, I would ...

Performance conversations can be uncomfortable. Using an approach that builds on strengths can help create trust and open dialogue. Regular performance conversations are an opportunity for mutual understanding. Feedback that is constructive and actionable creates space for employees to feel safe, especially when combined with open communication and acknowledgement. With this support, employees can thrive and develop in their careers.

Where insights meet impact

Workplace Learning and Career Navigation Tools: Performance Conversations

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