

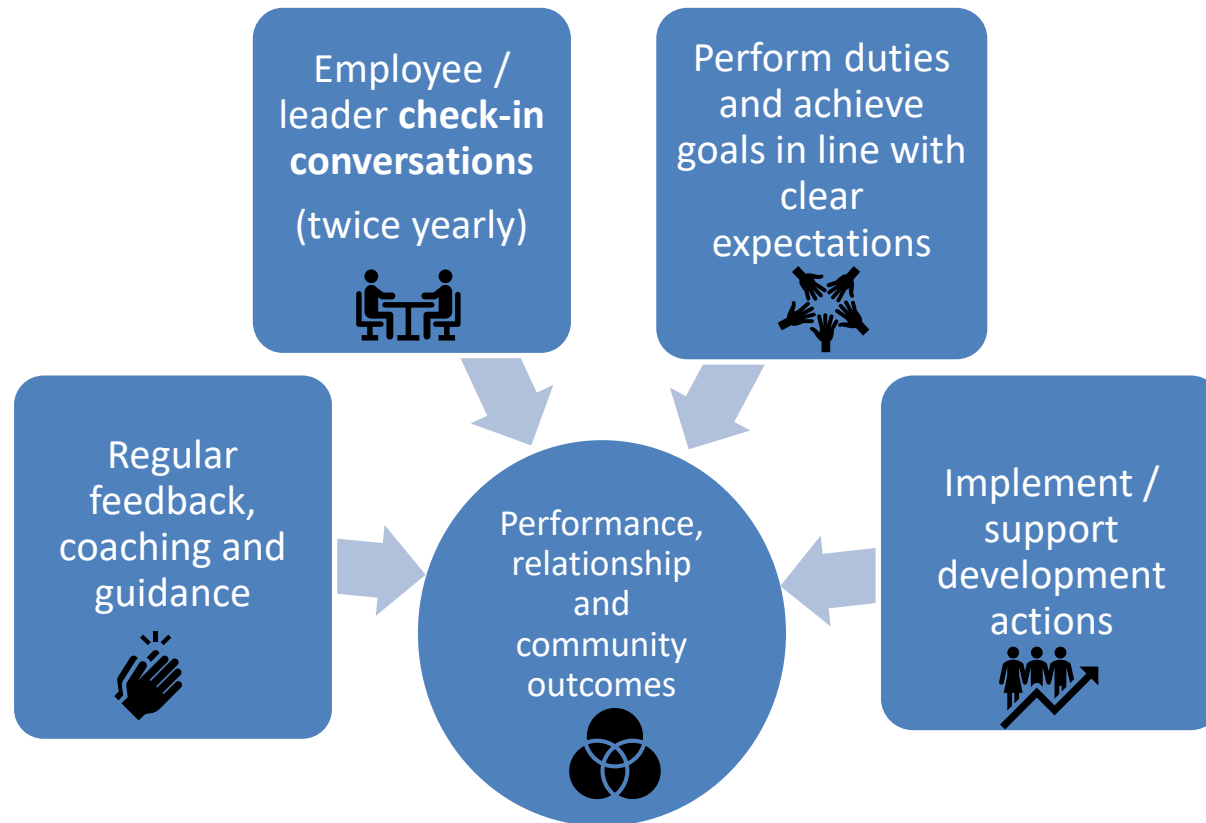
Guideline for quality check-in conversations



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Employee feedback and development model



Check-in conversations are twice-yearly structured meetings between a leader and employee, documented and monitored to ensure participation and effectiveness.

Effective employee feedback and development includes **four key elements** in this diagram that occur on an ongoing basis.

The impact of quality conversations

Quality conversations are key to achieving the desired workplace culture, recognising and supporting each individual employee and delivering quality services and outcomes for the City of Ipswich. We aim to create work environments in which:

- valuable conversations happen everyday within and across teams in multiple directions
- all employees benefit from well-considered, timely, constructive, evidence-based feedback that is provided and received with respect and in good faith
- feedback occurs in multiple-directions, enabling continuous improvement, improved relationships and greater cohesion
- 'good performance' is understood to incorporate both tangible or measurable outcomes as well as values-aligned behaviours
- significant achievements are identified, recognised and celebrated, at team and individual levels, in both formal and informal ways
- all employees have an opportunity to discuss their future and have a written Development Plan with shared responsibility for implementation
- leaders at all levels feel empowered to provide performance feedback and coaching
- the Employee Feedback and Development process is valued and positively impacts relationships and community outcomes

The Check-in conversation process

- **Twice-yearly Check-in conversations are a compulsory element of the Employee Feedback and Development model.**
- Each Division has its **own timeline/s** for the completion of the **twice yearly check-in conversations** that best aligns with its work flows and performance cycles and which are clearly communicated to and observed by all staff and leaders. General and branch managers are to advise their staff of their check-in cycle to allow appropriate planning and logistics.
- The **Employee Feedback and Development Administrative Directive and Procedure** should be referenced to ensure a clear understanding of the underlying purpose and principles of the program, as well as the **roles and responsibilities** of all parties (employee, leader, People and Culture, etc).
- Leaders should ensure team members are briefed on the upcoming process and have a chance to ask questions and/or clarify expectations ahead of time.
- **Effective planning and preparation** are key to quality check-in conversations. Refer to the *Check-in conversations Checklist* to ensure nothing has been missed and all actions occur in a timely manner.

Check-in conversation focus areas

Check-in conversations provide an opportunity for regular, two-way discussions that are guided by five key focus areas as reflected in the *Employee / leader check-in conversation form*:

General discussion

Goals

Performance factors

Career and future planning

Development planning

To be most effective and meaningful, conversations should take inspiration from the prompts and be tailored to focus on what's **most important to the employee. This will ensure the** conversation is relevant to the employee's role and aligned to their stage of employment and/or development as well as being appropriate to the nature and maturity of each work environment or team.

General discussion

Overview

The employee and leader engage in a conversation about the issues or topics relevant to them with a view to developing their working relationship.

The prompts provided help guide a meaningful, reflective conversation about the employee's experiences over the past six-months as well as what motivates them and how their role can be most effective. Achievements, development, and current or anticipated challenges are recognised and discussed as relevant.

Tips

- The conversation should be engaging and two-directional with the employee generally doing most of the talking in response to prompts or questions from the leader.
- The conversation is an opportunity to summarise and recap key achievements or challenges and to have an open, constructive conversation that is tailored to each individual employee.
- Leaders should be open to upward feedback and identifying opportunities to adapt or re-align their style and priorities in order to best lead, support and develop each employee, and to build and maintain effective relationships and teams.

- Each employee will set goals related to their responses to the general discussion questions and the challenges their position faces over the next 12 months.
- The number of goals and their objectives are agreed in discussion with the supervisor at Check-in conversations.
- Goals should be formulated using the SMART goals principle and example detailed below.



Developing SMART goals

	Description	Ask yourself	Example
Be Specific	The goal should be as precise and clear as possible about what is to be achieved	Is my goal clearly defined?	<i>Reduce resident waste collection complaints</i>
Make it Measurable	The goal should describe how to measure success (this could relate to quality, quantity, cost, time, etc.)	How will I know if this goal has been achieved?	<i>by 10%.</i>
Align it	Goals should align and support organisational goals	How does this goal connect to the overall business goals?	<i>Links to pillar 'Caring for our Environment'</i>
Make it Realistic	Goals should be challenging and realistically attainable	Is my goal achievable and also a challenge ('stretch') for me?	<i>Last financial year saw an increase of 2%</i>
Make it Time-Specific	A specific date for achievement of the goal should be set	By what date should this goal (or key milestones) be achieved?	<i>By end June 2021</i>

Performance factors

Overview

Effective performance is the sum of a range of factors, referred to in the Check-in conversation as Performance factors. These are common to all roles and are as follow:

- Skills and knowledge
- Quality of work
- Communication and work style
- Productivity and timeliness
- Teamwork, collaboration and cooperation
- Safety, integrity and governance

Quality conversations are achieved when each of these factors are considered and discussed in way that is meaningful and tailored to each role and individual.

Tips

- Ensure current role descriptions are in place and performance expectations in relation to each of these factors have been discussed and understood
- Employee prepares '**Self-reflection**' notes and gathers relevant examples for each Performance factor and provides this to leader prior to the Check-in conversation (ideally two day's before).

Performance factors

Tips

- Leader prepares for the conversation and makes own notes against each performance factor drawing on specific examples to support the conversation and ensure feedback is accurate and meaningful
- Preparation by both parties should consider the prompts provided to identify areas the employee is excelling in, where they are on track as well as where additional support or actions may be required to meet current role expectations, achieve workplace goals, or develop in line with career or work aspirations (this may involve cross-referencing the Development plan).
- During the meeting, each performance factor is discussed in line with the prompts provided. The leader provides their feedback, addressing different perceptions and clarifying work expectations as and when necessary.
- Agree and record any related actions for the next six-months (or milestones if longer term applies) to improve or enhance work effectiveness and/or maintain their current level of performance.
- Ensure regular feedback (outside of the Check-in conversation) is specific and reinforces and aligns with the Performance factors (see 'Providing effective feedback' on pages 15-16)

Career and future planning

Overview

An open conversation centred on the employee's immediate goals, longer-term career or role aspirations, and/or foreseeable plans relevant to their future at work with a view to establishing their Career and future plan, as well as informing aspects of their Development plan.

Tips

- The employee should be supported to identify and 'own' their career and future work plans; leaders should prompt, guide, reflect, explore ideas and offer encouragement or guidance during the conversation to help the employee formulate their plan.
- Leaders help the employee identify the gap between where they are now, and where they want to be, and to establish a reasonable timeframe and plan for success. At times, they may need to manage expectations through constructive feedback. Coaching methods and techniques can be very helpful here (see 'GROW model for effective coaching' on page 23).
- Key points or outcomes should be recorded as well as short and longer term actions that were identified and agreed upon .

Development planning

Overview

This conversation draws on previous aspects of the check-in to formulate a practical and meaningful action plan that clearly identifies:

- the development actions and responsibilities assigned to the employee and their leader,
- relevant timeframes
- the desired outcomes or impact that will generally support or align with organisational requirements.

Development planning is a key outcome of the Check-in process that ultimately reinforces a commitment to investing in our people.

Tips

- Ensure the full range of potential development activities are explored to help identify the best option/s for addressing the needs (eg how much is the need about new knowledge, skills, ways of thinking and working, behaviours, problem solving, etc). Examples include formal training or study programs, participation in professional organisations, attendance at conferences or networking groups, on-the-job coaching (giving and receiving), online learning, research projects, and secondment or project opportunities.

Development planning

Tips

- Position and/or accreditation requirements should be considered when identifying development actions (e.g. license or blue card requirements or renewals)
- ICC is committed to fair and equitable access to development opportunities with requests for development assessed on their merits against organisational requirements.
- It should be noted, and leaders should manage expectations accordingly, that some development opportunities will be subject to budgetary considerations and prioritisation will occur in line with business needs. Where this needs to be explored by the line manager, it should be noted in the actions and should form part of the ongoing conversation between the employee and leader.

Effective check-in conversations

Guide for leaders

- Open the meeting with a clear purpose that emphasises the importance of their Check-in conversation
- Use the conversation prompts to enable the employee to use the general discussion time to cover issues or topics of most importance to them
- Encourage the employee to lead the discussion on their effectiveness or support requirements in relation to the performance factors (referring to prepared notes or self-reflection)
- Interact in a way that engages the employee in the discussion through active listening, coaching techniques, open and/or probing questions, reflection, etc.
- Discuss concerns constructively and identify actions, support or development requirements
- Aim to establish a common understanding, particularly in relation to future plans and actions required to help the employee meet expectations (documented in the form)
- Provide feedback where relevant, drawing on the models and concepts presented as required (see *'Providing effective feedback* on pages 15-16)
- Ensure goals (where applicable) and future plans are understood and recorded using clear language (refer *'SMART model for team and individual goal setting'*)

Effective check-in conversations

Guide for employees

- Recognise the Check-in conversation as an opportunity to discuss things important and relevant to you, your performance and overall satisfaction at work
- Be prepared for the meeting and prepare appropriately for the discussion (e.g. self-reflection)
- Review your job description and other materials or documentation relevant to your role when considering your performance and effectiveness as well as future goals
- During the discussion, be comprehensive but concise and specific; flag issues you would like to discuss further outside of the Check-in conversation
- Be as objective, honest and realistic as possible, and be open to receiving constructive feedback. Ask for examples or clarification as required and contribute to discussions about future actions or development
- Share your thoughts on how your leader can support your development and future work performance in a constructive manner
- Raise any issues or obstacles to achieving your best performance or career goals and work with your leader to identify workable solutions
- Seek and provide feedback between Check-in conversations
- Carry out commitments and actions arising from your Check-in and be proactive in discussing progress and / or obstacles in a timely way

Providing effective feedback

To be effective, feedback should be informed by and/or verified through a range of sources and delivered in a way that is:

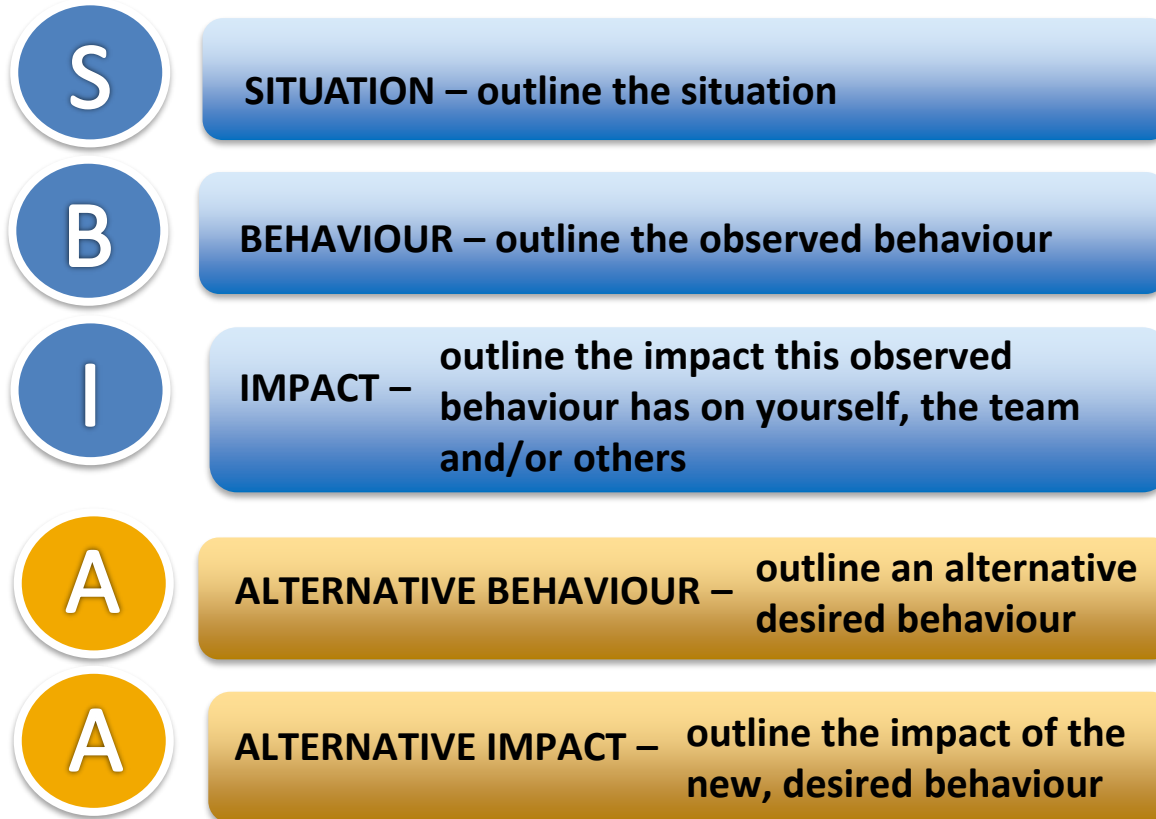
- authentic
- specific
- constructive
- timely
- continuous
- balanced / unbiased

Gathering reliable data and input regarding an employee's performance is an important aspect of preparing for Check-in conversations.



Sources of data and input regarding employee performance

Providing effective feedback



Effectively providing feedback in a regular, timely and meaningful manner helps to ensure timely resolution of an issue as well as recognition of successes or achievements. It also helps to ensure parties are well-informed and prepared for Check-in conversations.

This model enables feedback to focus on a specific situation and/or behaviour and the associated impact.

Alternative behaviours and impacts are then identified and agreed.

Recognising potential biases

Quality conversations rely on fairness and integrity.

Biases in perceptions and judgements, particularly in leaders, can have a serious negative impact on leadership effectiveness, equal opportunity and workplace relationships.

***Bias** is an error in judgment that happens when a person allows their conscious or unconscious prejudice to affect the evaluation of another person.*

Common biases

Common biases to be aware of:

- ***Recency bias*** – a tendency to focus on performance during the most recent period of time rather than the full period being considered
- ***Primacy bias*** – discussions focus on information learned early in the relationship
- ***Halo/Horn effect*** – allowing one good or bad trait to overshadow others
- ***Central tendency*** – viewing most performance factors as ‘middle of the road’
- ***Leniency bias*** – taking a favourable view of performance factors even if it is not genuinely deserved

Common biases

- ***Similar-to-me bias*** – a tendency to view people similar to oneself more favourably than others
- ***Idiosyncratic bias*** – using one's own ability (whether good or bad) as a basis for determining others' effectiveness
- ***Confirmation bias*** – focusing on information or evidence that supports a pre-existing view or belief
- ***Gender bias*** – providing preferential treatment to one gender over another, or using different criteria to determine performance effectiveness
- ***Law of small numbers bias*** – assessing a small team of performers against each other rather than consistent criteria

Source: [Cultureamp.com/blog/10-performance-review-biases-and-how-to-avoid-them/](https://cultureamp.com/blog/10-performance-review-biases-and-how-to-avoid-them/); 2020

Leadership strategies

Fair and constructive conversations

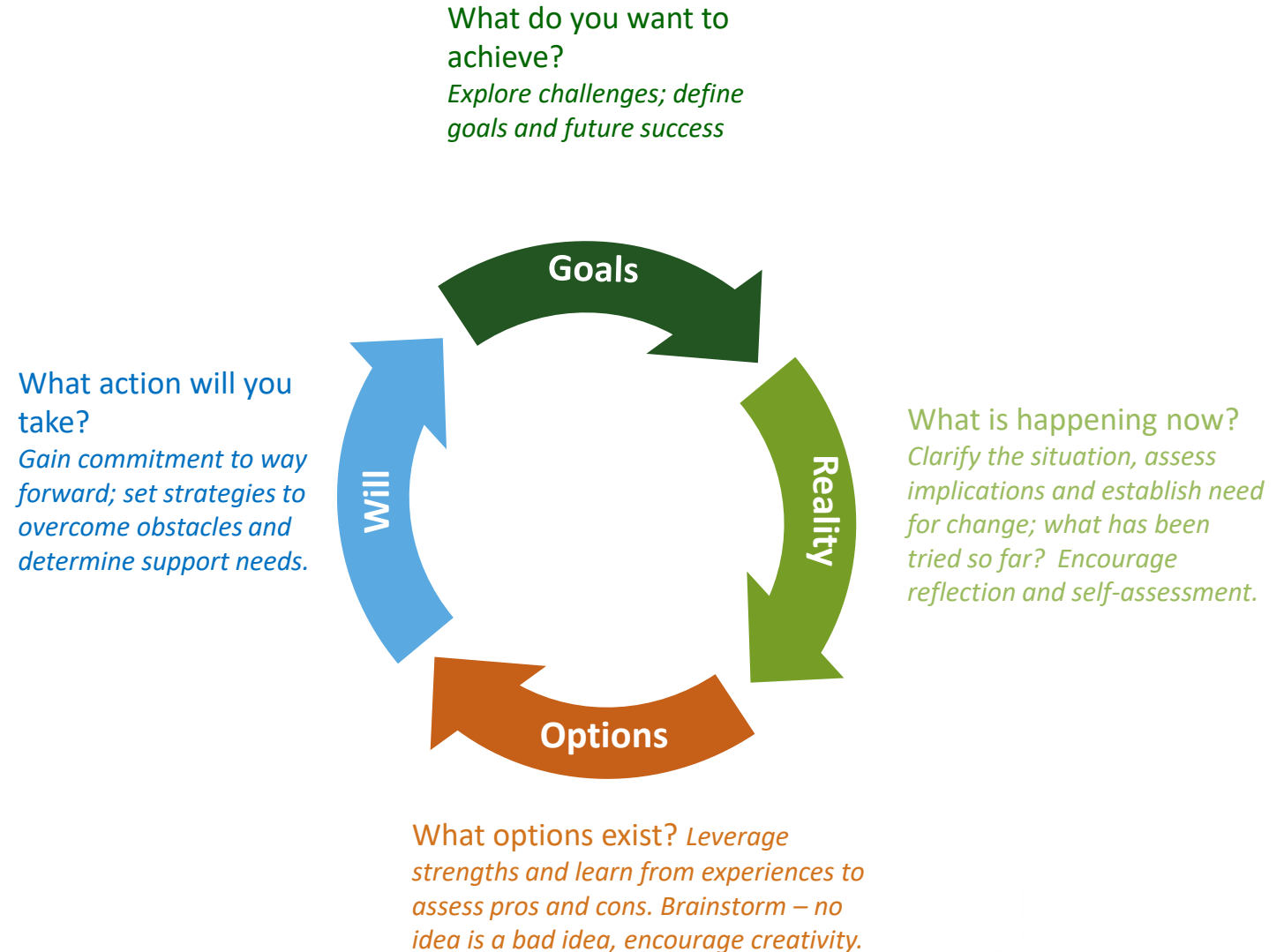
- Gather feedback and data frequently and intentionally throughout the period between check-ins from a range of sources
- Look at performance from multiple perspectives to ensure a balanced overall perception (refer to *Providing effective feedback* on page 16)
- Ensure a clear and consistent understanding of performance factors and what 'good' looks like
- Provide negative feedback in a manner that supports growth and development (e.g. be constructive, position it as part of broader feedback where there are positive things to also say; refer to *Providing effective feedback* on page 17)
- Participate in calibration or moderation sessions with peers to help build a clear understanding of how the performance factors are to be demonstrated for similar roles
- Prepare for each individual conversation, being mindful of the potential biases you may have (refer *Common biases* on pages 19-20)
- Seek and be open to identifying feedback information that challenges your existing perceptions (test your perceptions)
- Follow the format on the Check-in form and be professional, objective and constructive when noting comments
- Seek and be open to receiving feedback on your own style and tendencies as a leader; build self-awareness and commit to personal improvement

GROW model for effective caching

Check-ins are to be coaching and development oriented.

Coaching should be used between check-ins to support continuous improvement and to empower employees to solve their own challenges and drive their own performance.

The GROW model is a simple, four-step process that helps structure coaching sessions and approach.



Where to get advice, support or information

- Employee Feedback and Development Administrative Directive and Procedure
- People and Culture Partners
- Branch and general managers
- Induction training or briefings for new or newly appointed/promoted Managers / Line Managers
- Induction training for employees
- Refresher training for managers
- Annual awareness briefings for employees
- Leadership skills training e.g. coaching, providing feedback, performance management, etc