

Business Skills and Performance Management

Lecture Title: Coaching, Feedback & Difficult Conversations



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Human Resources Management

Learning Objectives

- Critically evaluate the effectiveness of coaching and feedback models in performance management
- Demonstrate the ability to conduct coaching-style conversations to enhance individual and team performance
- Apply ethical and professional principles when managing sensitive or difficult performance discussions



Group Discussion

Can you think of one feedback experience that you have received—positive or negative.

What was the feedback about?

How did it make you feel?

Did it lead to a change in behavior or performance?

How do you think that feedback can impact performance?



Feedback Impact on Performance

Feedback Type	Impact on Performance
Effective Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Clarifies expectations- Enhances learning and skill development- Motivates and engages- Guides behavior change
Ineffective Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Causes confusion or frustration- Demotivates or reduces engagement- Damages trust and relationships- Leads to avoidance or resistance

The impact of feedback depends not just on the content, but on how it is delivered—with clarity, empathy, and a focus on development.

Different Types of Feedback

Feedback Method	Description	Purpose / Use	Example
Formal Feedback	Structured, planned feedback, often part of performance reviews or appraisal processes.	To evaluate progress against objectives and document performance.	Annual performance review meeting.
Informal Feedback	Spontaneous, day-to-day feedback given in real time.	To reinforce or correct behavior immediately and encourage continuous improvement.	Manager provides quick praise or guidance after observing work.
Positive (Reinforcing) Feedback	Focuses on recognizing strengths, achievements, and effective behaviors.	To motivate, build confidence, and reinforce desired performance.	"Your report was thorough and clearly structured—great job!"
Constructive (Developmental) Feedback	Highlights areas for improvement in a supportive and actionable way.	To promote growth and improve performance while maintaining motivation.	"You managed the meeting well; next time, try summarizing key decisions at the end."

Different Types of Feedback

Feedback Method	Description	Purpose / Use	Example
Negative (Critical) Feedback	Focuses on what went wrong or needs change; often corrective and can be perceived as punitive if poorly delivered.	To address underperformance or inappropriate behavior.	"You missed the deadline; we need to discuss how to prevent this in future."
Upward Feedback	Employees provide feedback to their managers or leaders.	To promote self-awareness and leadership development.	Staff surveys or anonymous feedback on management style.
Peer Feedback	Colleagues provide feedback to one another.	To build team learning, collaboration, and accountability.	Team members review each other's project contributions.

Different Types of Feedback

Feedback Method	Description	Purpose / Use	Example
360-Degree Feedback	Feedback collected from multiple sources — peers, subordinates, supervisors, and self-assessment.	To provide a holistic view of performance and identify blind spots.	Multi-rater feedback report in leadership development programs.
Feedforward	Future-oriented guidance focused on what to do differently next time, not just past behavior.	To encourage growth and positive change without dwelling on mistakes.	“Next time, try starting the presentation with a case example to grab attention.”
Coaching Feedback	Uses questioning and reflection rather than direct evaluation to help individuals find their own solutions.	To build ownership, self-awareness, and problem-solving capability.	“What do you think worked well in that client interaction?”

Group Discussion

Can you explain what “Coaching” means?



Definition of Coaching

- “Coaching is a goal-directed, outcomes-oriented process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of the coachee’s performance, learning and development.”

Grant (2011)



Difference Between Feedback & Coaching

Aspect	Feedback	Coaching
Purpose	Provides information about past performance or behavior.	Supports development and future performance by facilitating self-discovery and problem-solving.
Focus	What happened, what was good or needs improvement.	How to improve, develop skills, and achieve goals.
Direction	Often one-way: delivered by manager or observer to the recipient.	Two-way: collaborative conversation; the coachee actively generates solutions.
Timeframe	Past-oriented, immediate or retrospective.	Future-oriented, developmental, ongoing.
Approach	Can be directive or evaluative.	Facilitates reflection, questioning, and goal-setting; non-directive.

Key Models of Coaching & Feedback

1. The GROW Model (Whitmore, 1992)

Purpose: A structured coaching framework to guide conversations, enhance performance, and achieve goals.

GROW Steps:

1. Goal – Define what the coachee wants to achieve. (*What is your aim?*)
2. Reality – Explore the current situation and challenges. (*Where are you now?*)
3. Options – Identify possible actions and strategies. (*What could you do?*)
4. Will / Way Forward – Commit to specific steps and accountability. (*What will you do next?*)

Key Points:

- Focuses on *future actions* rather than past mistakes.
- Encourages *reflection and self-discovery*.
- Simple, adaptable, widely used in coaching and performance management.



Key Models of Coaching & Feedback

2. SBI Model – Situation–Behavior–Impact

Purpose: A structured feedback model to give clear, objective, and non-judgmental feedback.

SBI Steps:

1. Situation – Describe the context in which the behavior occurred.
(“During yesterday’s team meeting...”)
2. Behavior – Describe the specific observable behavior, without interpretation or judgment.
(“...you interrupted several colleagues while they were speaking...”)
3. Impact – Explain the effect of the behavior on others, the team, or results.
(“...which caused confusion and slowed the discussion.”)

Key Points:

- Keeps feedback specific, factual, and non-personal.
- Reduces defensiveness and increases clarity.
- Useful for both positive and corrective feedback.



Key Models of Coaching & Feedback

3. BOOST Model – Effective Feedback Framework

Purpose: Ensures feedback is constructive, balanced, and actionable.

BOOST Steps:

1. Balanced – Include both positive and development points.
2. Observed – Focus on behaviors you have directly seen.
3. Objective – Keep feedback factual, avoiding personal judgments.
4. Specific – Provide clear examples rather than vague statements.
5. Timely – Give feedback as close to the event as possible.

Key Points:

- Promotes clarity, fairness, and trust in feedback.
- Applicable in one-to-one, team, and performance review contexts.
- Helps reduce defensiveness and increase receptiveness.



Key Models of Coaching & Feedback

4. 360-Degree Feedback

Purpose: Provides a comprehensive view of an individual's performance by collecting feedback from multiple sources.

Key Features:

- **Sources:** Feedback comes from supervisors, peers, subordinates, and sometimes clients, in addition to self-assessment.
- **Focus:** Behaviors, competencies, and skills relevant to performance and development.
- **Goal:** Identify strengths, areas for improvement, and blind spots.

Benefits:

- Enhances self-awareness.
- Supports personal and leadership development.
- Encourages accountability and collaboration.



Research Evidence on Coaching

Aspect	Evidence of Effectiveness	Limitations
Performance	Improves goal attainment, skills, and work performance (Theeboom et al., 2014)	Depends heavily on coach's skill and experience
Psychological Outcomes	Enhances self-efficacy, resilience, job satisfaction (Grant, 2011)	Requires time and organizational resources
Leadership Development	Supports emotional intelligence, reflective practice, and leadership capabilities (Jones et al., 2016)	Effectiveness is influenced by organizational culture and climate
Sustainability	Promotes long-term behavioral change when focused on self-directed learning	Poorly executed coaching can be demotivating or ineffective

Research Evidence on Feedback

Aspect	Evidence of Effectiveness	Limitations
Structured Models	Models like SBI, BOOST, 360-degree feedback improve clarity and actionable insight (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996)	Feedback can feel formulaic if over-structured
Timing & Specificity	Immediate, behavior-focused feedback is most effective (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)	Untimely or vague feedback reduces impact
Developmental Focus	Forward-looking “feedforward” feedback promotes learning and performance improvement	Feedback without follow-up coaching often fails to change behavior
360-Degree Feedback	Increases self-awareness and identifies blind spots (Bracken et al., 2001)	Can cause overload, bias, or emotional distress; requires skilled facilitation

Group Exercise

- Refer to your assigned model.
- In your group discuss the following:-

Strengths – What are the model's advantages for improving performance or development?

Limitations – What are potential weaknesses, challenges or constraints?

Situational Applicability – In what contexts or scenarios is this model most/least effective?

Research Support – What evidence exists regarding its effectiveness? Are there limitations or gaps in the research?



Coaching Conversations



Group Discussion

Watch the following video on putting the GROW model communication in practice.

-Take note on :-

What coaching skills do you observe?

How does the coach support reflection and ownership?

How does the conversation differ from directive feedback?



Coaching Conversations – GROW Model In Practice



Key Coaching Skills

Skill	Description	Example in Conversation
Active Listening	Demonstrating full attention through body language, minimal encouragers (“I see”, “Tell me more”), and summarising understanding.	“So, you’re saying that time constraints are the biggest barrier right now?”
Powerful Questioning	Open-ended, non-judgmental questions that promote reflection and self-discovery.	“What would success look like for you?”
Paraphrasing and Summarising	Reflecting back the coachee’s key points to confirm understanding.	“It sounds like you’d like to take more ownership of the project.”
Goal Setting	Helping the coachee define clear, specific, achievable goals.	“What’s one concrete step you can take this week?”
Empathy and Emotional Intelligence	Acknowledging emotions and maintaining psychological safety.	“I can hear that this situation has been frustrating for you.”

Difficult Conversations & Ethics



Group Discussion

Can you mention some reasons that can lead to difficult conversations between managers and employees?





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Difficult Conversations & Ethics

Category	Example Scenarios	Challenges
Underperformance	A team member consistently misses deadlines or quality standards.	Balancing honesty with empathy; identifying root causes.
Misconduct / Behavioral Issues	Inappropriate behavior, lateness, or breach of professional standards.	Maintaining fairness and confidentiality; avoiding bias.
Conflict Between Colleagues	Interpersonal tension or communication breakdown.	Managing emotions, neutrality, and ensuring resolution.
Sensitive Personal Issues	Mental health, stress, or personal circumstances affecting work.	Respecting privacy, offering support, maintaining boundaries.

Frameworks for Managing Difficult Conversations

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1. A. DESC Model (Describe, Express, Specify, Consequences)

Why it Works: Keeps discussion structured, factual, and non-accusatory.
Reduces emotional escalation by focusing on behavior, not personality.

Step	Description	Example
D – Describe	Describe the situation or behavior factually and objectively.	“I’ve noticed your last three reports were submitted after the deadline.”
E – Express	Express how the behavior affects you/the team.	“This causes delays for others who depend on your data.”
S – Specify	Specify what needs to change or what you’d like to see happen.	“I’d like you to submit reports by Wednesday noon.”
C – Consequences	Explain the positive/negative outcomes of change or inaction.	“Meeting deadlines will ensure smoother project delivery and recognition for your effort.”



Crucial Conversations Framework (Patterson et al., 2012)

Core Principles:

- 1.Start with Heart** – Focus on your true goals (e.g., solving the issue, not “winning”)
- 2.Make It Safe** – Create psychological safety by showing respect and intent to understand
- 3.State Your Path** – Share facts first, then feelings; avoid assumptions or blame
- 4.Explore Others’ Paths** – Invite the other person’s perspective with curiosity (“Help me understand your view...”)
- 5.Move to Action** – Agree on next steps, responsibilities, and follow-up

Why it Works:

- Encourages mutual purpose and respect
- Balances honesty with empathy
- Builds shared ownership of outcomes



Ethical & Professional Principles

Principle	Description	Practical Example
Confidentiality	Limit information sharing to those directly involved.	Discuss underperformance privately, not in team settings.
Fairness and Consistency	Apply performance standards equally; avoid favoritism or bias.	Use objective evidence when giving feedback.
Respect and Dignity	Treat all employees with respect, even when addressing misconduct.	Use neutral, non-judgmental language.
Boundaries and Professionalism	Maintain the manager-employee boundary; don't become overly personal.	Offer support without assuming a counseling role.
Accountability and Transparency	Be clear about consequences and expectations for change.	Document conversations and agreed actions.

Group Discussion

- Which framework (DESC or Crucial Conversations) do you find most practical for real workplace challenges?
- How can you ensure fairness and psychological safety during difficult discussions?
- What strategies will help you manage your own emotions in such conversations?



Fairness and psychological safety in difficult discussions

Key Theme	Explanation / Example
1. Prepare objectively	Gather evidence before the conversation (e.g., performance data, examples of behavior) to avoid assumptions or bias. Preparation ensures the discussion focuses on facts, not opinions.
2. Use neutral, respectful language	Avoid accusatory phrases (“you always...”, “you never...”). Instead, describe observed behaviors and their impact (“I’ve noticed... this has affected...”). This reduces defensiveness and preserves dignity.
3. Create a private and safe environment	Hold the conversation in a neutral, confidential space. Begin by setting a collaborative tone (“I’d like us to work together on this issue.”).
4. Demonstrate active listening and empathy	Give the other person space to explain their perspective. Listen without interrupting and validate emotions (“I understand this has been difficult for you.”).

Fairness and psychological safety in difficult discussions

Key Theme	Explanation / Example
5. Ensure procedural fairness	Apply performance and conduct standards consistently across employees. Follow organizational policies to avoid perceptions of favoritism or discrimination.
6. Encourage shared ownership	Frame the discussion around shared goals (“How can we work together to improve this?”) to promote mutual trust and accountability.
7. Be transparent about process and outcomes	Explain what will happen next, document agreements, and follow up. Transparency enhances psychological safety by removing uncertainty.

Strategies to Manage Emotions in Difficult Conversations

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Strategy	Description / Practical Example
1. Self-awareness and emotional preparation	Reflect on your triggers before the conversation. Identify what emotions (frustration, anxiety, avoidance) might arise and plan how to manage them.
2. Regulate through breathing and pacing	Use steady breathing or brief pauses to stay calm and centered if tension increases. Speaking slowly and deliberately helps maintain composure.
3. Focus on purpose, not emotion	Remind yourself of the goal — to resolve the issue constructively — rather than “winning” the discussion or defending your authority.
4. Separate person from behavior	Maintain empathy by distinguishing between the employee’s worth and their actions (“You are valued, but this behavior needs to change.”).

Strategies to Manage Emotions in Difficult Conversations

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Strategy	Description / Practical Example
5. Prepare key messages in advance	Plan the structure of your conversation (using DESC or GROW) so that emotions don't derail clarity.
6. Adopt a coaching mindset	Approach the conversation with curiosity ("What's causing this issue?") rather than judgment ("Why did you fail?"). This mindset reduces defensiveness and emotional escalation.
7. Seek feedback or supervision afterward	Discuss the experience with a trusted colleague, mentor, or HR professional to reflect and improve your emotional management skills.

Group Discussion

Watch the following video on handling a defensive person.

-Take note on :-

What communication skills do you observe?

How does the manager turn a defensive conversation into an effective one?



Coaching Conversations – Handling a defensive person





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