

# Conversation Modeling for Performance Reviews & Feedback Discussions

*Facilitation Guide*

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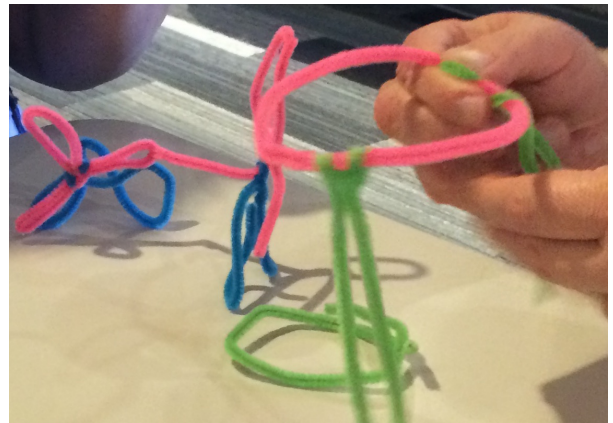
## **Background:**

Communication bias, emotions, nerves, limited two-way communication, and not asking enough questions can limit the effectiveness of performance review and feedback discussions. The following scenarios related to performance reviews and feedback discussions have been observed in organizations with agile software development teams:

- In technical fields, managers of technical staff may have less technical depth which can make it difficult for them to understand and provide feedback to their technical staff - in such scenarios, the relevance and effectiveness of feedback could be impacted by not asking enough questions to fully understand the technical scenario being discussed.
- Matrix staffing or self-organization patterns can result in less frequent feedback discussions between employees and their employment managers - in these scenarios, the infrequency of feedback discussions results in each party “telling” each other feedback since feedback items queue up over time and there is a perception that all queued items need to be communicated at once vs. a more effective 2-way discussion on the most important feedback items.
- In other instances, nerves, emotions, and fear can take focus away from communicating clearly resulting in less impactful feedback, or not taking enough time to ask sufficient clarifying questions to achieve mutual understanding of the discussion as it progresses.

It has been observed that the quality of feedback exchanged can be improved if a visual or physical model is introduced within the feedback discussion.

- The act of creating or building a visual or physical model prior to a feedback discussion promotes individual reflection on the question or feedback item.
- The time required to create a quick drawing or build a simple model slows and calms the brain seeking to increase critical thought and focus on the most important or impactful feedback items.
- When discussion begins, conversation focuses on the model, and those providing feedback will find they need to ask more clarifying questions about the model – this need to ask more questions to understand the model reduces the risk of jumping to a conclusion without sufficient information to do so. Additional questions result in improved understanding of what is discussed and reduce communication bias.
- Models created could be metaphorical, or they could be a representative of a real-life scenario, or situation.



Additionally, many find the act of building a model and then discussing it fun and a way to be creative, especially if a metaphor is used. Modeling can reduce the stress associated with a feedback and/or performance review discussion as discussion focuses on core issues through the model rather than through a direct conversation that can cause some people to shut down and not receive the feedback provided.

## **Workshop Objectives:**

- Allow participants to experience a conversation modeling technique that can be used to share / receive feedback and in doing so get a bit of feedback on things they do well and areas where they could improve.
- All participants will have the opportunity to build 4 models and discuss them with a partner as we go through the 4 components of a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats).
- Participants will have an opportunity to reflect and capture what they learned and areas for improvement discovered during the modeling exercise.

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### **Workshop - Sharing and Receiving Feedback using Models:**

- Find a partner to work with - in the event you can't find a partner, it is OK to join a group of three.
- With your partner you'll engage in 4 cycles of **Build / Share / Reflect** - as we work through the categories of Your Strengths, Your Weaknesses, Your Opportunities & Your Threats (SWOT analysis).

#### **Build**

When prompted, take a few minutes to build something that represents the named category. In this exercise, time is your constraint so you can choose if you want to focus on a single item within the category or if you wish to depict multiple items in your model. The facilitator will tell you when to begin and how much time you will have. If desired, you can augment your model with additional supplies but you will need to explain them, along with the rest of the model to your partner when time expires.

#### **Share**

With your partner, decide who will share first - present your model to your partner and then allow them to ask you questions and provide feedback. Ideally your model should tell a story that summarizes your thoughts for the criteria being examined. The facilitator will set a timer and inform you how much time you have to share and then discuss – make sure you watch time so you have some time for discussion and questions from your partner about your model after your presentation of it. When time expires, your partner will present their model and you will have a chance to ask questions and provide feedback.

#### Suggestions for questions to learn more about the model:

- Tell me more about that part of the model?
- Why did you build your model that way?
- What is the meaning of this part of the model to you?
- Is there a meaning to any of the colors in the model or the design of the model?
- What emotions (happy / sad / angry / confused) are captured within the model?
- Is there an experience that impacted you to build the model this way?
- What are the most important things you want people to know about your model - why are these items so important to you?

As you ask your partner questions, summarize what you hear and learn back to your partner and ask them to confirm your understanding of what they have shared – this reduces communication bias and misunderstanding.

#### Suggestions for prompts to provide feedback using the model:

- Is there a part of the model that you feel you could improve?
- What is holding you back from being able to improve that part of the model?
- What kind of assistance or advocacy would help you achieve that improvement?
- How would you feel and how would the model change if you improved that area?
- What have you tried to improve in the past and not been successful - what did you learn from those scenarios?
- Are there parts of the model where you don't think there is an opportunity to improve? Why do you think you cannot improve in those areas?

If offering guidance or a feedback, ask for clarification and confirmation from your partner to ensure they understand the guidance and/or suggestions you have provided.

#### **Reflect**

After each **Build / Share** cycle, use the attached Reflection sheet to capture a few notes on what you learned through your discussion with your partner and also what you are going to do to improve.

Repeat the **Build / Share / Reflect** cycle for the remaining criteria.

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