

INTERNAL

Guide to the Dialog appraisal interview

valid from 2024

Table of contents

1. Target audience for Dialog and this guide	2
2. Dialog: the new appraisal interview format	2
3. The philosophy behind Dialog	2
4. Procedure for Dialog (valid starting in 2024).....	2
Success factors.....	3
5. Overview of the Dialog form	4
6. Note about the form	5
7. Section 1: Status review.....	5
Looking back.....	5
Supervisor assessment.....	5
Employee comments on supervisor assessment.....	6
Outlook	6
8. Section 2: Personal development.....	7
Competencies development.....	7
Potential.....	9
9. Section 3: Future collaboration.....	10
10. Section 4: Conclusion	10
11. After the appraisal interview	11
Review by both sides	11
Confirm that the appraisal meeting took place.....	11
Filing the form	12

1. Target audience for Dialog and this guide

This guide is aimed at employees in technical-administrative positions, Senior Scientists and Established Researchers as well as their supervisors (including professors).

Other scientific roles such as Postdocs can also make use of Dialog. For doctoral students, the progress report and annual status conversation remain in place. See here for more info: [Progress report & Annual status conversation](#).

This guide will help you navigate the form for the new Dialog appraisal interview format, which was introduced at ETH Zurich in the summer of 2024. In the following pages, the procedure for the new appraisal form and the topics contained within will be explained and supplemented with examples.

2. Dialog: the new appraisal interview format

Dialog focuses on the following elements:

- More ongoing dialogue and more appreciation – less rating; letter grades for performance have been phased out.
- More looking towards the future – less discussion of the past.
- More mutual support – fewer one-sided expectations.

The ETH Zurich [Social and Leadership Competencies](#) have also been integrated into the format.

More detailed information about Dialog and the Dialog pilot project in 2023, along with the necessary forms and helpful materials, can be found on Staffnet at ethz.ch/dialog-en.

3. The philosophy behind Dialog

The Dialog appraisal format provides an opportunity to review the previous year and look forward, together with a focus on personal and career development. The ETH Zurich [Social and Leadership Competencies](#) serve as a foundation for this discussion. Good preparation, self-reflection and feedback are important factors for having a successful discussion with long-term impact. This feedback should be critical, aimed at development and also appreciative.

We should aim to have a Dialog interview based on mutual interest and empathy.

4. Procedure for Dialog (valid starting in 2024)

Starting at the end of June 2024, the new Dialog appraisal interview format will be made available to everyone. Normally, most of these interviews are held in August, September and October.

After the supervisor extends an invitation to the employee, the procedure is as follows:

- Both sides independently prepare for the interview
- Both sides take part in the interview
- The form is processed after the interview
- Interim discussions to keep the lines of communication open about objectives and agreements

Success factors

Supervisors

Phase	Steps
<p>Invite and prepare</p> <p>Time required: about one hour per participant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend an early invitation to your employee so that they can prepare on their own. It's mandatory to have one appraisal interview per employee per year. It is recommended to have additional meetings and to foster a culture of ongoing exchange. • Prepare for Dialog using the questions on the form. This guide contains additional explanations and examples. Don't forget to consider the objectives that were agreed on in the previous year.
<p>Conduct the appraisal interview: Appreciation and interaction on equal footing</p> <p>Time required: about one hour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome your employee to the meeting. Explain the procedure and answer any questions they may have. Discuss how notes will be made on the form and by whom. The notes should contain summaries of both parties' perspectives as well as any mutual agreements. • Discuss the four main sections of the form using the questions given or other individual factors. Give examples. • Ask the other person to share their perspective. Summarise their comments in the text field provided on the form. Make use of these Tips for listening > below «Building bridges» > The four levels of listening. • Briefly summarise your conversation and end on a positive note. You find tips for saying thank you below «Building bridges».
<p>Stay in touch: Ideally, the conversation should be ongoing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the completed form with your employee. Answer any questions they may have. • Keep the lines of communication open. Hold regular interim meetings and discussions.

Employees

Phase	Steps
<p>Prepare thoroughly</p> <p>Time required: about one hour per participant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haven't received your invitation yet? Ask your supervisor. You're entitled to one appraisal meeting per year. • Go through the key questions on the form. This guide also contains additional explanations and examples below. Don't forget to consider the objectives that were set in the previous year. Take notes.
<p>Actively take part in the Dialog interview</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share your perspective and any wishes or concerns. Give examples. Make suggestions for goals, tasks, projects and/or development measures. • Listen to your supervisor. Ask if anything is unclear. Make use of these tips for listening.

<p>Time required: about one hour per participant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give feedback on the discussion.
<p>Stay in touch: Ideally, the conversation should be ongoing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have questions about anything written on the form, clarify them as soon as possible. • Check the box at the bottom of the form to confirm that you've covered all the discussion points. Return the PDF to your supervisor. • Start working towards your new objectives. If necessary, you can request support or agree on adjustments with your supervisor. • Keep the lines of communication open. Request interim meetings/respond to your supervisor's request for interim meetings.

5. Overview of the Dialog form

The form contains four key sections:

1. Status review
2. Personal development
3. Future collaboration
4. Conclusion

There is an additional page for adding comments.

ETH zürich

Employee: _____ Conversation date: _____ Supervisor: _____ Time period: _____

Dialog This discussion gives us the opportunity to reflect and look forward together – with a focus on personal and career development. Good preparation, self-reflection and feedback are important factors for having a successful discussion with long-term impact. Feedback should be critical, development-oriented and appreciative.

1. Status review

Looking back What were the objectives, tasks and projects? How well were they executed? What were last year's highlights and challenges? Why?

Supervisor assessment

We are on the right path, and today we will be looking towards the future together.

We are not always on the right path, and we will be discussing that today.

In case of missing or insufficient performance and/or behaviour, an individual objective achievement plan is required, and HR partners need to be involved.

Employee comments on supervisor assessment

Outlook What objectives, tasks and projects have been agreed on for the coming year? Which contribution is expected? A supplementary sheet on objectives, tasks and projects can be found [here](#) if needed.

2. Personal development

Technical, methodological, personal and social competencies form the foundation of our success. The social and leadership competencies outlined by ETH provide guidance on this point. They apply equally to supervisors and their employees.

Click on the plus sign to see the indicators for each of the social and leadership competencies

Competencies development What competencies are your strengths (technical, methodological, personal, social)? Where is there room for improvement? How can your supervisor provide support?

Potential Where is potential and how can it be unfolded in the coming years? In which areas can more responsibility be taken to learn from it?

Further information on personal development can be found on [Staffnet](#).

3. Future collaboration

Here, employees can provide feedback to their supervisors. What is appreciated about the collaboration? What should there be more of/less of? How could the collaboration be improved in the future?

4. Conclusion

Reflect on the discussion as a whole and close on a positive note.

Discussed

Employee

Supervisor

1/4 ETH Zurich Dialog 2/4 ETH Zurich Dialog 3/4 ETH Zurich Dialog

Key topics are given to guide both parties through the conversation.

6. Note about the form

The form can be filled out as a PDF or a Word document. You should save the form to your computer so that you can open and complete it in Adobe Acrobat or Word. **Please note:** If you use the web version, you may lose your data.

7. Section 1: Status review

This part of the discussion involves a look back, a supervisor assessment and an outlook for the future; it is intended to aid both parties in clarifying the employee's work situation. The three components of this section form a unified whole, meaning that the look back influences the supervisor's assessment, which in turn influences the outlook with new objectives, tasks or projects.

1. Status review

Looking back What were the objectives, tasks and projects? How well were they executed?
What were last year's highlights and challenges? Why?

Looking back

In this section, the views of both parties towards the employee's objectives, tasks and projects are discussed and recorded.

The supervisor and the employee should also discuss highlights and/or challenges with the goal of showing appreciation, reflecting on lessons learned and establishing new objectives.

- Which work situations stand out?
- Think about situations or previous agreements regarding collaboration, performance, learning and/or development.

Supervisor assessment

The supervisor uses the nuances of the review section as a basis for their assessment and provides the employee with feedback about their working relationship early in the discussion. The supervisor then selects one of the following checkboxes:

- **“We are on the right path...”**: The expectations regarding performance and behaviour have generally been met or exceeded. Even if this is selected, there can still be room for development – for example, building up professional and methodological knowledge, optimising certain behaviours and dealing better with challenges in the future. Any agreements made on this point are to be recorded in the “outlook” or “personal development” sections later in the document.

- **“We are not always on the right path...”**: When it comes to performance or behaviour, there are certain aspects that are satisfactory. However, there are some important aspects that need to be improved, since they do not meet the standards for performance and behaviour for the employee’s role.

Supervisor assessment

- We are on the right path, and today we will be looking towards the future together.
- We are not always on the right path, and we will be discussing that today.

In cases involving unsatisfactory performance and/or behaviour, an individual objective achievement plan is required, and HR partners need to be involved.

If you as a supervisor feel that there are clear performance and/or behavioural issues, you will need to separately document goals and measures to address this. In this case, the relevant HR partner needs to be involved, and the agreed-on goals and measures should be reviewed in a timely fashion.

Employee comments on supervisor assessment

Employee comments on supervisor assessment

If the employee has any comments about their supervisor’s assessment, they should be recorded here. It is not mandatory to fill out this field.

Outlook

In this section, both parties discuss mutual expectations for upcoming objectives, tasks or projects for the next year. New duties and areas of responsibility can also be recorded here. You can use the linked supplementary sheet as a guide and to make more detailed notes. Objectives, tasks and projects are usually detailed out in separate tools such as project plans, One-Note or Microsoft Planner.

Basic recommendations for the “Outlook” section:

- Strike the right balance between ETH/supervisor requirements and the needs of the employee.
- Keep the outlook clear and realistic.
- Objectives, tasks and projects should be monitored on an ongoing basis, also after the appraisal interview, since they are subject to change.

Outlook What objectives, tasks and projects have been agreed on for the coming year?
Which contribution is expected?
A supplementary sheet on objectives, tasks and projects can be found [here](#) if needed.

8. Section 2: Personal development

This section focuses on the professional, methodological, personal and social competencies of the employee and their opportunities for their development.

We consider intentionally strengthening the six social and leadership competencies to be crucial for the success and well-being of everyone at ETH.

It's also important for us to recognise the potential in our employees and to allow them to develop.

2. Personal development

Technical, methodological, personal and social competencies form the foundation of our success. [The social and leadership competencies](#) outlined by ETH provide guidance on this point. They apply equally to supervisors and their employees.



Click on the plus sign to see the indicators for each of the social and leadership competencies

Competencies development

Both parties should discuss professional, methodological, personal and social competencies. Think about important competencies for the future such as digital skills, e.g., how to use cloud services, AI and other new technologies. It can be helpful to discuss the [der Social and Leadership Competencies](#) along with their indicators, with the goal of identifying and working on the employee's strengths and weaknesses from a social and personal perspective.

They should also discuss how the supervisor will provide support (e.g., offering a platform where leadership competencies can be trained).

Competencies development	What competencies are your strengths (technical, methodological, personal, social)? Where is there room for improvement? How can your supervisor provide support?
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Examples

Example #1 – competencies development: “Mika”

Strengths: «Nurturing well-being» & «Living inclusivity». Mika is an administrative assistant who pays attention to the well-being of all team members and is dedicated to fostering a sense of cohesion in the team. She tries to take everyone's needs into account and works to ensure that everyone is treated equally and that no one gets the short end of the stick.

Areas for improvement: «Building bridges» & «Enabling people». Mika should seek out more contact with administrative assistants from other areas in order to exchange knowledge and to use opportunities for collaboration. She could try seeing feedback as an opportunity to reach her potential, not as a critique of her personality.

Support from supervisor: Encourage Mika to seek out contacts; remind her to see the constructive and well-meaning aspects of feedback.

Example #2 – competencies development: “Chris”

Strengths: «Acting responsibly» & «Building bridges». Chris is an IT developer who proactively considers the possible consequences of his own actions. Chris proactively approaches his colleagues, involves important stakeholders at an early stage and is empathetic and cautious.

Area for improvement: «Driving innovation». Chris is very well informed about trends and developments. He could be more daring when it comes to trying out new things and being less perfectionistic. In one-on-one meetings with his supervisor, he always takes the time to discuss new things that he's learned, and he works to contribute his experiences within the team.

Support from supervisor: Discuss and issue reminders about the 80/20 rule in one-on-one meetings; discuss trends in one-on-one meetings; offer a platform in team meetings.

Example #3 – competencies development: “Robin”

Strengths: «Enabling people» & «Driving innovation». Robin is a team leader who has a very good understanding of how to coach team members to find their own solutions. She cultivates a healthy error culture in her team. Robin is very innovative and contributes ideas, solutions and technologies in discussions with the aim of implementing state-of-the-art solutions and acting efficiently.

Area for improvement: «Nurturing well-being». Robin is very performance-oriented and dedicated to ETH. She could try to pay more attention to her own work-life balance and to be less strict with her expectations of herself and others.

Support from supervisor: regularly remind her of the 80:20 rule; encourage her to model a more constructive error culture.

Potential

Here it is recommended to discuss the needs of employees when it comes to reaching their personal potential. There might be certain situations in which the employee's potential was clearly demonstrated and which could serve as a basis for further development.

This can be used to define development and learning goals for the following years regarding how the potential of the employee can be fostered. These goals can involve on-the-job measures (such as taking on new tasks and areas of responsibility), self-directed learning or internal/external professional development courses. Keep professional, methodological, personal and social aspects in mind.

Potential Where is potential and how can it be unfolded in the coming years?
In which areas can more responsibility be taken to learn from it?

Further information on personal development can be found on [Staffnet](#).

Employees are expected to take initiative for their own development and career planning and can find additional helpful materials and inspiration on [Staffnet](#).

Example for potential: “Camille”

Camille is a member of administrative staff who successfully contributed to Project X and found the work highly motivating. Camille would like to focus more on projects and become a project manager in the medium term.

Together with her supervisor, she is considering what possibilities there are to take part in additional projects and gain insights into project management. She is seeking out opportunities to talk to other project managers at the university and to find out if there are brief, job-specific training opportunities that could help her advance in this area.

9. Section 3: Future collaboration

The future collaboration section is focused on giving employees the opportunity to share feedback with their supervisor about their working relationship, with the overall aim of improving the collaboration.

If applicable, both parties use this feedback to agree on changes that the supervisor could make to their behaviour. Examples include providing more support, granting more autonomy, reducing administrative workload, etc.

3. Future collaboration

Here, employees can provide feedback to their supervisors.

What is appreciated about the collaboration? What should there be more of/less of?
How could the collaboration be improved in the future?

Example

Andrea is an assistant who generally highly appreciates her working relationship with her supervisor. However, the atmosphere in the department is fast-paced, and there are many short-term changes to the schedule, which creates stress.

Andrea would like to see more adherence to the one-on-one meeting schedule. They're often cancelled at short notice, which makes her work more difficult or impossible. Her supervisor Florin will do his best to only postpone meetings, especially the weekly one-on-one meetings, instead of cancelling completely.

10. Section 4: Conclusion

At the end of the meeting, the supervisor should take the opportunity to end on an appreciative note and thank the employee. → [Saying thank you](#) in the “Building bridges” section.

The employee is also allowed to make some final remarks.

4. Conclusion

Reflect on the discussion as a whole and close on a positive note.

Example

Dominique (supervisor) to Jannick (employee with a team lead position): The way you think is inspiring, and I appreciate how you advance our team in an innovative and proactive way. Your way of dealing with people is very pleasant. It's nice to have you in the team, and I would like to thank you for your dedication.

Jannick to Dominique: Thank you for your support and the valuable collaboration and lively exchange that we have. I look forward to meeting the challenges that the next year will bring.

11. After the appraisal interview

Review by both sides

As soon as the form is completed, the supervisor should send it to the employee for review (or vice versa, if that's what was agreed on). If one of the parties has questions or would like to adapt the text to reflect their own perspective, you should try to have a clarifying discussion in order to reach a consensus.

Confirm that the appraisal meeting took place

Both parties should tick the respective boxes at the end of the form to confirm that the appraisal interview took place and that the content on the form was discussed. Checking the box does not signal agreement. There might be differences of opinion recorded in the "Supervisor assessment" and "Future collaboration" sections, for example.

Discussed

Employee

Supervisor

The form does not contain an area for signatures. However, both parties can print out the form and sign it if they wish.

Filing the form

We recommend filing the form in the employee's electronic file (SAP).

Please send the document in PDF format to your HR admin contact using the following file name:

Contract number*-last name-first name-area-Dialog-year

Example:

240551-Doe-Jane-ARCH-Dialog-2024

*You can find your contract number in ETHIS under "Employment & Salary" > "My Employment Data".