

## *Applying CREAM Strategy to Coach Teaching*

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### **Abstract**

Being in charge of monitoring and evaluating Foundation Program staff tutors necessitates constant follow-up to make sure that they are in line with the University's mission and vision. This has raised a fundamental educational question 'how to coach rather than monitor the tutors'. To answer this question, Cottrell's (2008) C.R.E.A.M. strategy was applied to coach these tutors following GROW Model as a framework for structuring both team and individual coaching sessions. A two-day coaching/training session was conducted at the beginning of the semester to maximize the benefits of the foundation tutors' potentials by familiarizing them with the course material and sharing best teaching practices. The aim of this training session was to help them develop the learners' general English language skills and equip these learners with the necessary study skills to pursue their academic major at a university level. After that, two induction sessions were presented to familiarize them with the teaching methods, study calendars, assessment rubrics and group/double marking. This is in addition to conducting 360 evaluation cycle based on students' feedback, peers' feedback and head of the program feedback. Cottrell's strategy was initially developed for enhancing the learner's self-directed/autonomous learning. For the purpose of this implementation, the researchers applied C.R.E.A.M. strategy as a self-assessment and observation tool. Being pragmatic leaders, they conducted three team coaching sessions and one-to-one individual sessions throughout the academic semester following GROW Model to establish SMART Goals, examine the current Reality, explore possible Options/Obstacles, and establish the Will. A checklist was developed to measure the staff tutor's self-assessment of their Creative, Reflective, Effective, Active, and Motivated teaching practices and the same checklist was used by the rater as an observation checklist to evaluate these practices. The two tools were statistically analyzed and a correlation was formed.

Keywords: CREAM strategy, Coach Teaching, and Pragmatic Leaders.

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## **Introduction**

Coaching is a process that enables individuals to achieve their full potential. It helps them in making real, lasting changes and facilitating the exploration of their needs, motivations, desires, skills and thought processes. Parsloe (1999, p. 32) defines coaching as “a process that enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve. To be successful, a coach requires a knowledge and understanding of process as well as the variety of styles, skills and techniques that are appropriate to the context in which the coaching takes place”. Through observation, listening and questioning techniques, a coach could help individuals understand the current situation and identify needed solutions and actions rather than adopting a wholly dictated method. Whitmore (2002, p. 19) stated that “getting better performance from any group or individual, yourself included, means permanent change in the way you think [coach]. Change of this kind is not a single transaction but a journey, and the journey has a specific starting point [reality] and a clear destination [goal].” Coaching guides individuals to set appropriate goals and methods of assessing their progress in relation to these goals. Coaching can be done individually or in groups taking many forms and applying a variety of techniques which may include one-to-one training, facilitating, counselling and networking (Shermon & Shermon, 2016).

## **Coaching And Performance**

Gallwey (2000, p. 40) defines effective coaching as “...unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.” Whitmore (2002, p. 23) describes coaching as “...the essential management style or tool for optimizing people’s potential and performance. Commanding, demanding, instructing, persuading with threats, overt or covert, cannot produce sustainable optimal performance, even though they may get the job done.” Thus, coaching is not just meant for enhancing poor performance, it can also be used to help project team members or staff tutors develop and achieve their goals, while producing better results on their projects or enhancing their teaching practices. Whitmore (2002, p. 28) highlighted the importance of coaching to enhance performance; ‘if either the quality of a performance or learning from the experience is important, coaching is a must.’ This importance of a coach suggests that effective coaching is necessary for progression of performance.

Coaching offers a vehicle for analysis, reflection and action that ultimately enable individuals to achieve success in one more areas of their life or work. It also encourages a commitment to action and the development of lasting personal growth and change. Moreover, it maintains unconditional positive esteem in that the coach is at all times supportive and non-judgmental of the individuals; their views, lifestyle and aspirations. The role of the coach is to encourage individuals to work within their area of personal competences. Continually improving these competencies and develop new developmental associations where necessary to achieve their goals in light of their qualifications and experience with high performance (Knight et al., 2015; Shermon & Shermon, 2016). The coach should make sure that individuals are working on developing their own competencies not on developing unhealthy dependencies on the coaching relationship.

Individuals will be able to evaluate the outcomes of the coaching process and use objective measures wherever possible to ensure that the relationship with their coach is successful and that they are achieving their personal goals and maximizing their performance.

### **Grow Model Of Performance Coaching**

In the 1980s, Sir John Whitmore and his team of Performance Consultants developed the GROW model which is now firmly embedded in the world of business coaching. GROW stands for: Goal, Reality, Options, and Way forward. For establishing the Goal, the coach should prepare individuals to set their Simple, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timed (SMART) goals and examine if these goals fit with the overall career objectives and the team's objectives. Then, the coach should set an observation checklist to follow up the individuals' accomplishment of these goals. After that, the coach should guide the individuals towards examining the current Reality by evaluating what is happening now and what sort of obstacles stand in the way, setting milestones to take the necessary steps towards the target goals, picturing the effect of this on the long run, and identifying any potential conflict of their goals with other goals or objectives. Thus, individuals should be guided to explore different available Options and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each option. They should be guided to consider the weight of each option and what should be done to achieve it. Finally, the coach helps individuals to set the Will by deciding what they will do next within a certain timeframe keeping in mind what type of obstacles might hinder their progress and how to overcome them as shown in figure (1) below (Whitmore, 2009).

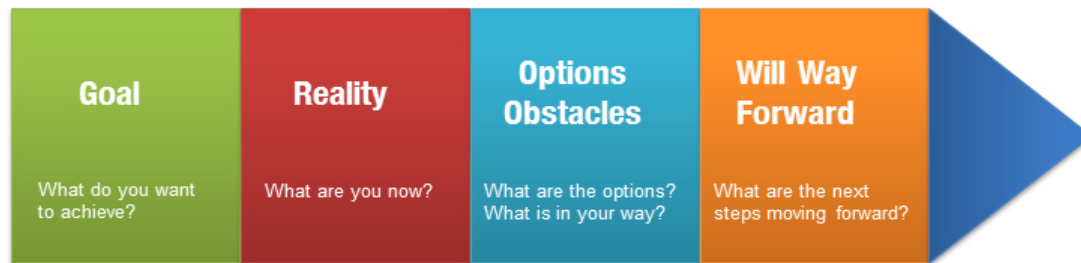


Figure (1): GROW Model of Performance Coaching  
Adapted from Coaching for Performance by John Whitmore, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2009

A good example of CROW Model of Performance Coaching is driving a car. Before the car driver drives the car the Goal and destination should be identified by exploring the current Reality such as checking the car tyres, oil level, petrol, etc. Then, the driver should choose from different Options the most effective route that would save time, effort and money to reach the chosen destination. Finally, the driver Will start driving using his/her efficiency as a licensed driver to get to the desired destination. While driving the role of the coach is highlighted. The coach would guide the driver to mind the mirror's blind spot announcing that there is another car approaching. By the same token, a coach

can guide the individuals to plan their teaching and improve their performance by highlighting their strengths and overcoming their flaws.

### **Characteristics of an Effective Coach**

A good coach should promote an individual's self-evaluation and reflection of his/her own performances. In sports, "a coach who is other than consistently enthusiastic, whatever the team's results or mood is in the wrong job" (Wade, 1997, p. 22). Thus, an effective coach "...applies intelligence to leadership and can involve persuasion and compelling players to go along with them" (Wade, 1997, p. 30). In such a field, if players or athletes are not led or steered properly through training, they may feel unsure of what the coach is trying to achieve and reluctant to change their training or technique. Similarly, if tutors are not inducted or guided appropriately towards the best teaching methods for achieving the target learning outcomes, they might lose track of what should be delivered and how to help learners reach these desired outcomes. Wade (1997) believes that in order for coaching to be effective the coach must exhibit a number of qualities such as: leadership and intelligence, analytical ability, confidence and decisiveness, integrity and reliability, vision and imagination, coping with unpleasantness, organization and administration, and enthusiasm. Therefore, an effective coach should provide formative evaluation and constructive reflection on individuals' performance including the good and bad areas which need improvement and suggest suitable models for each one.

### **A Coach as a Pragmatic Leader**

Adopting the pragmatic leaders' approach, the researchers acted as thoughtful leader, sensitive to their organizational environment, and willing to modify their goals or strategies periodically. Pragmatic leadership meant to develop a leadership competence that balances the best elements of efficiency and context.

In order to meet the needs of stakeholders, clients or customers, you may need to be flexible to ensure that the day-to-day priorities of your team – and the over-arching priorities of the organization – can adjust to remain responsive, relevant and competitive.....the pragmatic leader is able to deal with the day-to-day issues and challenges in a straight forward, practical manner.....pragmatic leadership is made up to two essential components: principles and experience (Bedell-Avers et al., 2009, p. 301).

Being a pragmatic leader, one of the most important roles is to coach your team members to do their best. By doing this, you get them to be better decision makers, problem solvers, continuous learners for new skills, and career oriented. For the purpose of this study, the researchers implemented concepts like honesty, integrity, fairness and transparency to coach their staff tutors. Once the leaders' values are aligned with principles and built on experience, they can be confident that their chosen approach is the correct, defensible and sustainable one. Therefore, the researchers chose Cottrell's C.R.E.A.M. strategy to coach their team's teaching practices.

## **C.R.E.A.M. Strategy**

Cottrell (2008) is an international bestselling author who believes in the C.R.E.A.M strategy for learning. In her book 'The study skills Handbook', she focuses on developing the learners' self-learning skills and equip them with the necessary study skills to pursue their academic major at a university level. In this implementation, the researchers worked on applying C.R.E.A.M strategy to coach their staff tutors' teaching by spotting the light on their strengths and helping them to overcome their weaknesses and flaws.

To promote Creativity, the researchers coached their team to increase their confidence in using their own individual strategies and styles that work best for them. In addition to applying their imagination to their teaching practices. As for being Reflective, the researchers guided their team to reflect on and evaluate their own performance identifying their strengths and weaknesses and what is missing in their class. They were also encouraged to pay class visits to their colleagues' classes to learn from each other. Moreover, the tutors were also encouraged to make their teaching practices Effective by understanding their students' needs (needs analysis) and having their state of mind, space, time and materials organized in the ways that best suit their way of teaching (planning). Consequently, with enough planning and preparation, the tutors will make their teaching effective saving time, effort and money.

Being Active is one of the important dimensions in Cottrell's strategy (2008). Active teaching exists when tutors are involved in what they are teaching and constantly looking for ways of getting their students be more involved in and responsible for what they are learning through using games, debates, role plays, simulations, field trips, etc. The tutors should set short-term goals and involve their students in setting these goals. They should be aware that their level of Motivation will affect their success and their students' success as well. Thus, tutors should be coached that motivation is the key for pursuing goals reaching success and that attitude is everything! If the students feel that their tutors are not motivated, they will not be motivated. To sum up, C.R.E.A.M strategy is a general principle which encourages individuals to stop, think & reflect on ways of improving the way they teach and learn constantly.

## **Framework**

The conceptual framework of this implementation discusses its methodology that presents the participants, duration, hypothesis, measures, research design, setting/delivery, and instruments/assessment tools. Finally, it ends with presenting the results and findings with brief discussion. Each concept is discussed with detailed description in the following sections.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The implementation of this study was administered on 19 staff tutors working for Arab Open University (AOU), Kuwait Branch. These tutors were teaching the general English language courses at the Foundation Program, English Language Unit (ELU), AOU.

### **Duration**

The duration of the implementation was one academic semester. It started in the fall semester of the academic year 2015/2016 and continued till the end of the same academic semester.

### **Hypothesis**

The implementation aimed to investigate the effect of Cottrell's C.R.E.A.M. strategy on improving the staff tutors' teaching performance following GROW Model of performance coaching.

### **Measures**

Data for this study were collected through fifteen questions developed for observing and assessing the staff tutors' performance in teaching general English language at the foundation program. The Observation/Self-Assessment Checklist was designed to test the five dimensions of C.R.E.A.M. strategy (Creativity, Reflective, Effective, Active, and Motivation). For the purposes of this study, the checklist was used by the tutors as a self-assessment tool and by the rater (head of the foundation program) as an observation general summative assessment tool for the tutors' teaching performance. The tutors' self-assessment responses and the rater's observation response for each tutor were statistically analyzed and a correlation was formed.

### **Research Design**

The implementation adopted the descriptive design to review and survey previous literature and studies related to its variables (C.R.E.A.M. strategy and GROW model of performance coaching). A quasi-experimental design was adopted to assess the tutors' teaching performance using the observation/self-assessment checklist.

### **Setting/Delivery**

A two-day coaching/training session was conducted at the beginning of the fall semester of the academic year 2015/2016 to coach the staff tutors teaching general English language courses at the foundation program. The session also aimed to maximize the tutors' teaching potentials by familiarizing them with the course aims, intended learning outcomes, materials, assessment tools in addition to sharing best teaching practices. This coaching session was to help them develop the target learners' general English language

skills and equip these learners with the necessary study skills to pursue their academic major at a university level. After that, two induction sessions were presented to familiarize the same staff tutors with the teaching methods, study calendars, assessment rubrics and group/double marking. This is in addition to conducting 360 evaluation cycle based on students' feedback, peers' feedback and head of the foundation program feedback (the rater).

### **Instruments/Assessment tools**

One instrument was used twice to measure the variables of the study. An observation/self-assessment checklist was developed to be used by the tutors to assess their Creative, Reflective, Effective, Active, and Motivated teaching practices at the beginning of the semester. Then, the same checklist was used by the rater (head of the foundation program) as an observation checklist to evaluate these practices at the end of the same semester. The two tools were statistically analyzed and a correlation was formed.

### **Results and Discussion**

The 19 tutors responded to the fifteen questions of the self-assessment checklist at the beginning of the fall semester of the academic year 2015/2016 to assess their Creative, Reflective, Effective, Active, and Motivated teaching practices. They were asked to provide a brief description to their experience after responding to the questions and analyzing their own data. They were asked to share their findings regarding what they learned about themselves and how far they are applying the C.R.E.A.M. strategy in their teaching practices. They were also asked to share their future plans to improve their teaching practices in light of C.R.E.A.M. strategy. The tutors' responses to each dimension of C.R.E.A.M. strategy and the rater's observation for each one was statistically analyzed and a correlation between each tutor's self-assessment and the rater's observation was formed as indicated below.

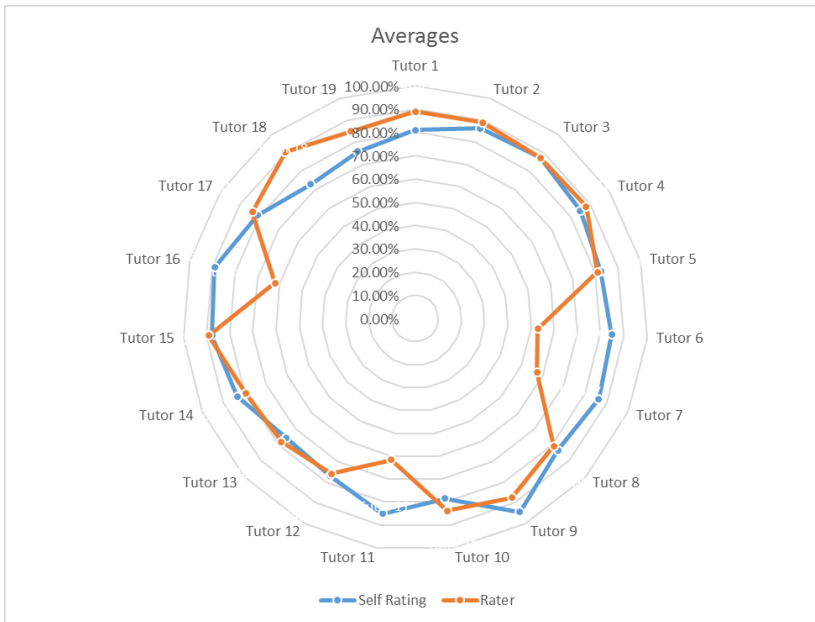


Figure (2): The Overall Averages of Tutors’ Self-assessment Responses and Rater’s Observation on C.R.E.A.M. Strategy

As shown in the above graph (figure 2), there were a few discrepancies between some of the tutors’ self-assessment responses and the rater’s observation. As a result, the rater held an individual one-to-one coaching session with each tutor. During this coaching session, the rater discussed each dimension of CREAM strategy to make sure that the concept is clear to this tutor and provided relevant field examples to clarify each dimension and how to implement it in teaching.

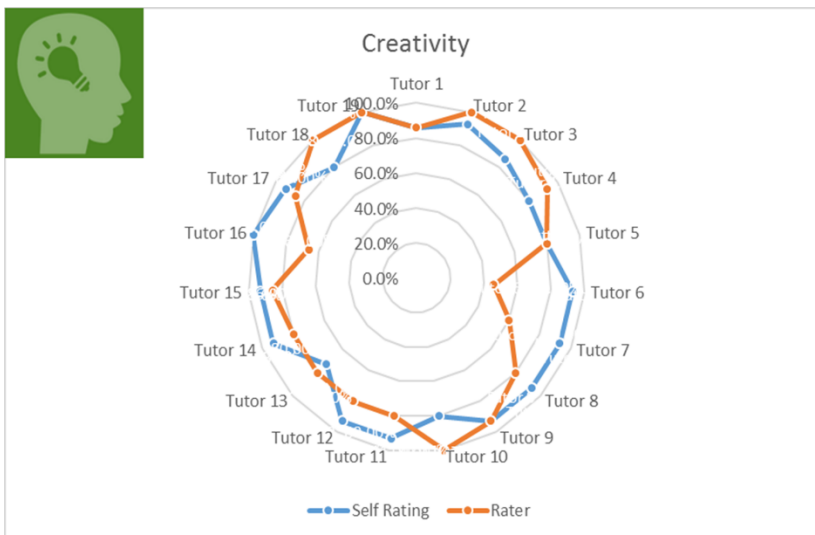


Figure (3): Tutors’ Self-assessment Responses and Rater’s Observation on the Creativity Dimension

As shown in the above graph (figure 3), there were a few discrepancies between some of the tutors’ self-assessment responses and the rater’s observation on the creativity



dimension. Thus, the rater provided a relevant example that occurred during teaching Oral and Presentation course. She explained that when teaching a speaking course, a tutor must be extremely creative to encourage students to come at the front of the class and speak up for two minutes. In one of the speaking classes, the chapter was about healthy food, so the rater came to class wearing a chef's hat and an apron. She displayed a toy cooking set equipment and started the lesson teaching the students a funny receipt on how to cook fried eggs. Then, students were given five minutes to prepare a recipe of their own and come at the front of the class to present it. This was so much fun and created a very comfortable atmosphere where all students had the courage to participate in the class discussion and speak up. Another example on creativity was also in a speaking course. The chapter was discussing practicing sports, so the rater went in class wearing sports clothes and holding a volleyball. Then, she and the students did an aerobics session before they started passing the volleyball discussing the target topic.

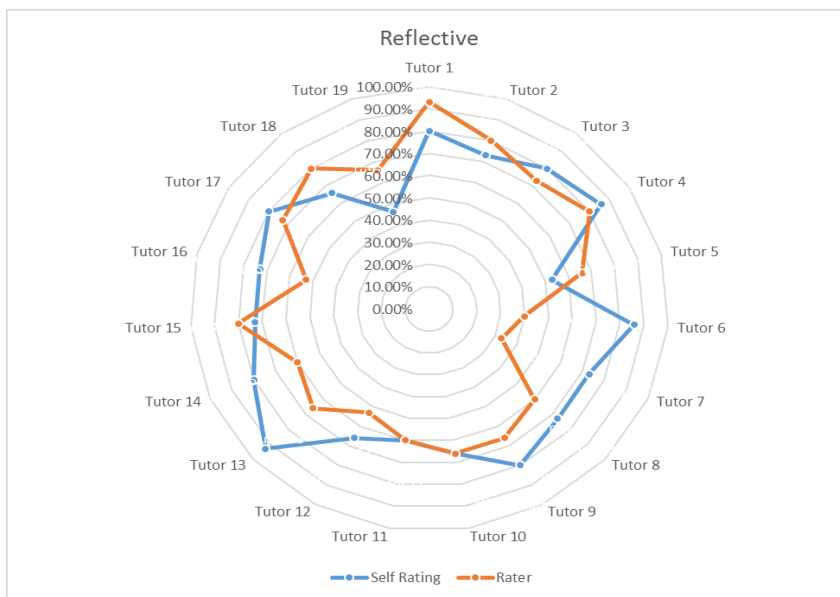


Figure (4): Tutors’ Self-assessment Responses and Rater’s Observation on the Reflective Dimension

As shown in the above graph (figure 4), there were a few discrepancies between some of the tutors’ self-assessment responses and the rater’s observation on the reflective dimension. Accordingly, the rater provided the following example discussing the importance of being reflective on one’s own teaching practices. She stated that going into a lecture without being ready is very bad and does not sound professional at all. She was asked to teach a writing course for business studies where she was given a very short notice to prepare the course. After finishing the first lecture, she left the class and started crying because she reflected on her teaching practice and discovered that the lecture went so bad thus she gave herself a zero satisfaction degree. As an educator, you must evaluate yourself and ask yourself every time you finish your lecture: How did I do? Did I deliver the information in a suitable/right way? Did the students receive and assimilate the information I delivered well?



Figure (5): Tutors’ Self-assessment Responses and Rater’s Observation on the Effective Dimension

As shown in the above graph (figure 5), there were a few discrepancies between some of the tutors’ self-assessment responses and the rater’s observation on the effective dimension. Therefore, the rater provided the following example discussing the importance of organizing and managing one’s own time. Being as effective tutor means that you should be highly productive saving time, effort and money while performing any task. You need to know what your students’ needs are. You have to plan your lecture well. Even though you might be teaching the same subject for more than one semester using the same course guide, calendar and material, you need to have a clear lesson plan for each session that might require few adjustments based on your students’ needs. Moreover, you should realize that you set an ideal example to your students, you cannot ask them to be on time if you are not.

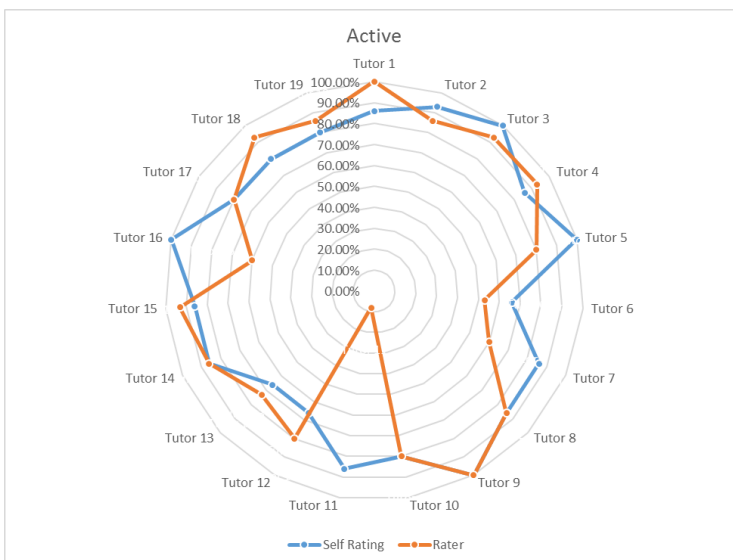


Figure (6): Tutors’ Self-assessment Responses and Rater’s Observation on the Active Dimension

As shown in the above graph (figure 6), there were a few discrepancies between some of the tutors' self-assessment responses and the rater's observation on the active dimension. Consequently, the rater provided the following example regarding the level of students' involvement in setting goals and class interaction. The rater stated that in all classes tutors must make sure that their students are involved in all sorts of activities. The tutors should divide their students into groups and ask them to write a short script on a given topic to perform a role-play using their own words and ideas. Tutors can ask students to use their mobiles (mobile learning) because they like the idea of using them in class and at the same time, they will be involved in doing something that is common among all. Students can use their mobiles to google a topic or even a word.

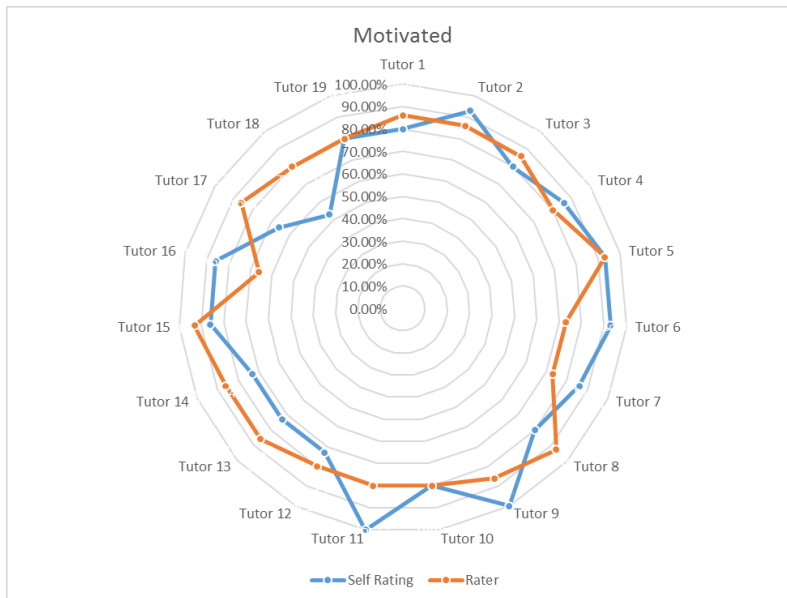


Figure (7): Tutors' Self-assessment Responses and Rater's Observation on the Motivation Dimension

As shown in the above graph (figure 7), there were a few discrepancies between some of the tutors' self-assessment responses and the rater's observation on the motivation dimension. As a result, the rater provided the following example. As a coach you need to be motivated first, then you can ask your staff tutors to be motivated. Same applies for your students. You should be motivated intrinsically and extrinsically so as to be able to get your students motivated. Your staff tutors should see and feel that you are motivated, thus they will reflect this motivational attitude on their students. They will reward them since they have been rewarded by their coach/leader. The rater used to hold an end of semester meeting by the end of each semester to acknowledge each tutor's effort and share good practices. She used to buy gifts and rewards to distinguished tutors, group leaders and coordinators to encourage them to keep the high teaching performance and encourage other to do their best so as to be awarded the following semester. There are many ways of motivating your staff tutors and students. Here comes the sense of creativity again.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

There were some major factors that contributed to the success of coaching the staff tutors' teaching practices using C.R.E.A.M. strategy such as leading with examples, adopting open door policy, building trust and gain confidence through establishing a friendly atmosphere, empowering your staff, killing rumors/gossips, acknowledging efforts and providing incentives whether financial or moral incentives. The most important success factor is showing empathy and tolerance because we are all human being and we can learn from our mistakes (what does not kill you makes you stronger).

However, there were few failure factors that have acted as obstacles and challenges in front of the success of this study. These failure factors should be avoided to be able to coach your staff tutors successfully such as resistance of some tutors to accept change and get out of their comfort zone, emerging of few personal issues that would make the tutors distrust their coach/leader, unconvincing goals and visions, unclear tasks and instructions, impractical methods, insufficient tools, and unprofessional assessment techniques whether formative and/or summative assessment.

## **Recommendation**

In light of the previous data analysis and the coaching with examples technique, the following can be recommended:

It is advisable to encourage general course coordinators across AOU branches to adopt C.R.E.A.M. strategy to coach their branch course coordinators. It will be beneficial to urge AOU branch course coordinators to adopt C.R.E.A.M. strategy to coach their teams (concerned tutors). Moreover, it is recommended for all team leaders to coach their tutors through C.R.E.A.M. strategy. Finally, it is highly recommended for you to coach your own teaching in the light of C.R.E.A.M. strategy.

## Appendix A

### Observation / Self-Assessment Checklist Applying CREAM Strategy

Tutor's

Name:

Course (s): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

CREAM strategy was developed by Stella Cottrell, an international bestselling author, to promote self-directive/autonomous learning. The aim of this self-assessment tool is to measure how far you apply CREAM strategy on your teaching.

Read each statement carefully and indicate how frequently it applies to your teaching style (always, often, sometimes, rarely or never) by Putting  in the box that best describes your teaching.

Statement	Likert Scale				
	Always 5	Often 4	Sometimes 3	Rarely 2	Never 1
1. I have the confidence to use my own individual strategies and styles that work best for teaching.					
2. I challenge myself to be creative and apply my imagination to my teaching.					
3. I am a curious person. I ask my students some questions to get to know them well and discover their needs.					
4. I reflect and evaluate my own teaching performance through identifying my strengths and weaknesses.					
5. I ask myself what is missing in my class.					
6. I do peer class visits and I make use of the feedback I receive from other tutors.					
7. I set realistic, measurable mini-goals and take things one step at a time.					
8. I organize and manage my time properly and be in class on time.					
9. I put myself into an extremely teaching mood and make my classes as enjoyable as possible.					
10. I involve my students in my teaching by participating in setting intended goals to take responsibility of					

learning.					
11. I look for links between different things to facilitate my students' constructive learning.					
12. I take charge of my class and manage it like a project.					
13. I see difficulties as challenges and opportunities for progress because every problem has a solution.					
14. I believe that my level of motivation will affect my success.					
15. When I meet my goals, I reward myself and set more challenging goals.					

Write your score below:

Creative	Reflective	Effective	Active	Motivated
1. -----	4. -----	7. -----	10. -----	13. -----
2. -----	5. -----	8. -----	11. -----	14. -----
3. -----	6. -----	9. -----	12. -----	15. -----
-----/15	-----/15	-----/15	-----/15	-----/15

Percentage of CREAM Strategy = Total sum of all columns  $\times 100/75$

$$\text{-----} \times 100 \div 75 = \text{-----}\%$$

Reflection on the checklist:

1. What did you learn about yourself?

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2. What do you plan to do to improve your teaching style in the light of CREAM strategy?

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