



15 Best Questions

for effective employee evaluation
during Performance Reviews

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How'd you like to have a look at the most effective questions to evaluate employees during performance reviews?

(I have compiled a long list over 12 years of interactions with HR leaders across industries)

Well consider yourself very lucky...

...because today I'm going to open the treasure trove and share with you 15 of the absolute BEST questions to evaluate employees performance.

But let's go back a step & understand why we are here.

What's wrong with Performance Reviews?

51% of employees question the effectiveness of performance reviews.

Employees hate reviews. Managers too.

On the other hand, Managers comment that performance reviews are their second most hated task.

Second only to firing someone!!!

That's the sorry state of affairs on employee evaluation.

At the centre of this disgust is the performance appraisal form.

Employees believe the review questions are vague & not connected to their work and aspirations.

So, what's the problem with the Review questions?

In most cases, employees feel that review questions are completely irrelevant and are directly picked up from a generic template without personalizing it as per individual needs.

Some of the common complaints about the review questions are

1. *Not relevant to current job*

Many times employees don't understand how a review question is relevant to the work they are doing or the project they are in. It's like reviewing a Technology Developer on performance in Financial Accounting!!!

2. *Does not recognize career aspirations*

Since review questions are generic in nature, they tend to miss the individual's ambitions within the organization, thus promoting a feeling that the organization does not care about the employee's future.

3. *Short term focused*

Since employee development discussions rarely happen independently & are clubbed with performance reviews, a very short term approach is widely observed in the questions asked to employees.

4. *Unclear linkages to organizational objectives*

Employees don't realize how their work impacts the company's performance. Neither, how soft skill aspects like attitudes & values at work are critical.

5. *Doesn't address diversity*

Same review template form is applied to a large group of employees. All review questions are treated with equal importance



8 Hygiene Factors of performance appraisals

Problems galore but solutions, where art thou?

Before I give you the 15 best review questions on employee evaluation that I have carefully collected after 12 years of interaction with industry leaders, let me first tell you what I have learnt from the mistakes that our performance reviews commit. Appraisals should be -

1. **Personalized** for each employee.
2. Focused on **long term employee career aspirations** too
3. Described by **how actual performance will be measured/evaluated**
4. Allowed for both **Descriptive & objective assessment** with free flow of qualitative inputs
5. **Weighted according to priority** as per employee's job responsibilities
6. **Mutually agreed** upon by employee & manager before the review
7. **Evaluated independently** by employee & manager to allow unrestricted inputs
8. **Open for disagreement** by employee after Managers have given their inputs

The 15 Best Employee Performance Review questions

Problems galore but solutions, where art thou?

Yes, as with everything if we try hard, solutions are waiting for us. And review questions are no different.

These 15 review questions are categorized in the following groups

1. Performance
2. Competencies
3. Development
4. Commitment
5. Feedback



CHAPTER ONE

Review Questions on Performance



1. KRA Achievements/ Misses

Type: Objective/ Subjective

What has the employee actually achieved or missed against what was committed or planned for each of the Key Responsibility Areas (KRA)?

Review Methods

- 1) Comparison of the actual performance against planned using the performance measures or the key performance indicators (KPIs) agreed prior to the review
- 2) Identification of the root causes for both success and failure. This again is a critical step to better prepare for the future. & provides opportunities for feedback for the employee, manager & the organization

Is this a popular practice?

Yes, this is widely used across organizations as the template to compare plan vs. actual, expectations vs. achievements of an employee's performance over the review period.

1. KRA Achievements/ Misses

Type: Objective/ Subjective

Keep in mind

Most managers & employees get too hung upon the numerical ratings for each KRA or OKRs. While ratings are a matter of debate on its actual relevance, there are 2 very important things to keep in mind.

- a) For each KRA, the employee should be absolutely clear on how the performance will be measured & what the key performance indicators (KPI) are. This discussion between the employee & manager should happen at the beginning of the review period.
- b) Root cause qualitative assessment for each KRA performance is the primary necessary & sufficient condition for this aspect of employee evaluation.

2. Going the Extra Mile

Type: Subjective

Since the whole is always greater than the sum of the individual parts in the context of a business, each employee's stretch for the extra mile is a critical differentiator for organization success.

So, this review question requires a subjective evaluation of how the employee has supported an Internal Stakeholder - Senior, Peer or Junior or an External Stakeholder - Customer, Vendor or Partner to achieve business benefits for the organization.

Review Methods

Feedback should be sought from sample stakeholder groups by the employee & manager. There should be option to give feedback anonymously to let the feedback respondent air his/her views without worrying about reactions.

After collating the feedback, employee & manager needs to identify what has been done right, what went missing and ways to improve in the future.

2. Going the Extra Mile

Type: Subjective

Is this a popular practice?

In some form or the other, “Going the extra mile” is popularly covered to be rated or discussed but not widely as an independent review question.

Keep in mind

The focus should be to look for opportunities to go the extra mile after taking care of one’s own KRAs. It should not be such that employees start underperforming on their primary responsibilities or commitments for the sake of getting favorable reviews on this.

3. Handling Opportunities & Blows

Type: Subjective

Beyond the employees own KRAs & helping others' along the way, there is this world of surprise where unanticipated opportunities or blows arrive. Sudden Opportunities can be a new project/business, in skill development or even partner relationships. On the other hand blows can range from personal losses to a project being scrapped or a business unit shut down.

How did the employee respond to these while staying focused & delivering on one's primary duties?

Review Methods

The Manager & Employee should first sit together & agree on the opportunities & blows that came along during the review period and the professional & personal context in which these appeared for the employee.

Then, they should independently assess how the employee responded to the situation against what could have been an expected response, the quality of decisions taken & how the organization supported the employee and what impact this had to the organization in the end. Also, identification of key learning & recommendations to help improve the employee's response to similar incidences in the future is very important.

Finally, there should be a closure discussion where the employee & manager exchange notes, discuss and agree on the key leanings and recommendations for the future.

3. Handling Opportunities & Blows

Type: Subjective

Is this a popular practice?

Rarely! Very few organizations actually help employees improve responsiveness to sudden opportunities or blows while staying focused on their key responsibility areas.

Keep in mind

There should be an understanding for both the Reviewer & the Reviewee of what qualifies as an opportunity or a blow relevant to the professional context of the employee. Further, there should be an agreement on these just prior to the review.

4. Drive for Improvement/Quality

Type: Subjective

Quality is a continuous journey & the drive to improve, to do & be better is what helps individual employees grow & eventually contribute more to the purpose of the organization.

This review question requires a reflective assessment on aspects that the employee has improved in significance as compared to the past & its impact on the job.

Review Methods

The Manager & Employee should first check back on the areas of improvement identified in the last review & assess their relevance in the context of the current job and whether there should be any more added to the list.

Then, they should independently assess the employee's progress and recommend rectification strategies if any.

Finally, there should be a concluding discussion where the manager & employee exchange their assessment and conclude on a future plan for continuous improvement.

4. Drive for Improvement/Quality

Type: Subjective

Is this a popular practice?

In some form or the other, “Drive for Improvement/Quality” is popularly covered to be rated or discussed but not widely as an independent review question.

Keep in mind

Since every individual’s drive towards quality cannot be expected to be same, there should be an agreement on what would be considered better quality for the employee in the context of each of the area of improvement, how the employee can work towards it and the support expected from the organization.

5. Innovation & New Ideas

Type: Subjective

Innovation as an expected output is quite controversial. None really knows what it exactly should stand for. But in simple words, if quality stands for “how can I do my job better”, innovation stands for “can I do my job differently or can we do something different too?”

This review question does not end with a plan as none can plan to be innovative, but rather develop a better understanding of how to be innovative & ideate effectively.

Review Methods

The Manager & Employee should independently assess the contributions of the employee towards being innovative & bringing new ideas to the table as well as the organization’s openness to accept and adapt to the employee’s initiatives.

There should be a concluding discussion on the possibilities in the context of the job for the employee & the organization’s expectations in any new areas of focus.

5. Innovation & New Ideas

Type: Subjective

Is this a popular practice?

Innovation as a term is extremely popular & is a critical review parameter during performance appraisals. However, the review methods are mostly limited to providing a rating & seldom focus on how the employee can improve to being innovative.

Keep in mind

The focus should be on quality of ideas & the ease of execution. After all, just ideas don't help anyone if not implemented.



CHAPTER TWO

Review Questions on Competencies



6. Fulfillment/Gaps with job role

Type: Objective/Subjective

Skills are what the employee brings to the table to do an assigned job.

This review question helps assess the strengths & gaps of the employee towards fulfilling the key responsibility areas (KRAs).

Review Methods

It is expected that the employee & manager both understand the key competencies required to do the job that is assigned to the employee. So, anytime a new task is assigned, the employee should be aware of any new skills required to effectively complete the task. Prior to the review, the employee & manager should agree on all the job competencies that were expected to be demonstrated through the year for all the tasks assigned to the employee.

Then, the Manager & employee should independently assess the competency level of the employee on each of them and recommend plans to develop in the near future.

Finally, there should be a discussion on the final needs for competency development & the timeline to develop them.

6. Fulfillment/Gaps with job role

Type: Objective/Subjective

Is this a popular practice?

Yes, competency or skill evaluation of employees is very popular across organizations.

Keep in mind

A review on competencies should never happen if the employee or the Manager is not even aware of the expected skills required for the job that the employee does. Competencies should include both functional & personal aspects and have weightages in line with the priority of one over the other.

7. Career Path

Type: Subjective

As the employee progresses in his/her career within the organization, what are the skills that the employee demonstrates against those expected to be possessed, gaps and how these can be planned to be developed in the near future through training or job tasks.

Review Methods

Every employee has a career aspiration while the organization too plans for the path that the employee should traverse in the company. Again aspirations or plans change or evolve. So, the first step is to understand and align the individual's aspirations to the organizational expectations and agree on the career roadmap at the beginning of the review.

Once agreed, the next step is to identify the skill requirements of the chosen career path and assess the fulfillment & gaps if any.

This review question should be a collaborative discussion that concludes with the plan that prioritizes development of missing or under-displayed competencies along a timeline for the employee.

7. Career Path

Type: Subjective

Is this a popular practice?

Yes, but restricted to high performing employees in most organizations.

Keep in mind

Skill requirements for a job constantly evolve according to market and technology evolution. So, developing an employee demands a continuous updation on the current expected skills needed for a chosen career path.



CHAPTER THREE

Review Questions on Development



8. Development plan achievement/misses

Type: Subjective

Employee development is one of the most critical factors influencing employee satisfaction, retention & organizational benefits. This review question evaluates the fulfillment of the development objectives of the individual employee during the review period.

Review Methods

Notes from the last review should have reference to plans on development of skills for current job roles and future career path as well as performance aspects in terms of drive for quality, innovation and stretching for the extra mile.

Prior to the review, the Manager & the Employee should collate all that was committed by the employee and the Organization towards a holistic development plan for the employee.

During the review, there should be an objective assessment of the development objectives fulfilled & those that were missed during the review period.

While concluding, the Manager & employee should check on the opportunities that were availed to develop the employee – be it training programs, special projects or curated work assignments, and assess the relevance and effectiveness of these for future reference.

8. Development plan achievement/misses

Type: Subjective

Is this a popular practice?

Yes, but generally personalized to a job role than an individual employee.

Keep in mind

Development is not equal to training. Opportunities for development can come from working on a special task or an internal project or even attending a conference. So, this review question needs to evaluate the employee's development exposure through all such varied avenues.

9. Effectiveness of development

Type: Subjective

Getting trained or an opportunity to work in a project is the first step towards attaining a development objective for the employee. The more critical aspect is to assess the effectiveness of the development initiative & this review question deals with that.

Review Methods

For each development opportunity that the employee availed, there should be a Manager & employee evaluation on the effectiveness of the initiative during the Review process. This should be done by a Before & After assessment i.e. How was the employee before? What were the objectives to be fulfilled? How was the employee after? What is the impact on the job responsibilities? Is the fulfillment of objectives long term?

In cases where the impact of the development initiative trails off after some time, there should be a check on the follow up steps and their effectiveness.

Finally, key highlights should be drawn to provide inputs to personalize future development plans in terms of the needs of the employee, the effectiveness of one type over the other for the employee etc.

9. Effectiveness of development

Type: Subjective

Is this a popular practice?

Yes, but detailed assessment is rarely done. Effectiveness of a development initiative is seldom assessed at regular intervals to identify needs for refresher initiatives.

Keep in mind

Evaluation will be most effective if objectives to be met by a development initiative are well understood by the employee or the manager. Otherwise, assessing effectiveness will be quite a futile exercise.

10. Self driven initiatives

Type: Subjective

Development is best attained if there is a strong self drive to improve & be better. That's why this review question is very important as it assesses the employee's initiatives to develop own & others irrespective of organizational impetus.

Review Methods

During the Review, the employee should list all the initiatives taken by oneself to develop in accordance with the objectives that were laid out during the review period.

Not only that, a very important aspect of organizational development is sharing one's knowledge & skill – So, what are the instances when employees who are specialized in something have gone ahead to put up, say an internal training together to help colleagues improve in this area too.

Based on this, the Employee & Manager should discuss effectiveness of such initiatives and identify learnings/takeaways to make self driven development a more effective endeavor.

10. Self driven initiatives

Type: Subjective

Is this a popular practice?

No, development is largely driven as a HR function & not much weight is given to employee self development drives.

Keep in mind

Self driven initiatives are without purpose if development objectives are not clear for the employee. That's why the objectives of development should be well understood & agreed upon by both employee & manager.



CHAPTER FOUR

Review Questions on Commitment



11. Future objectives & key results

Type: Subjective

An important aspect of employee evaluation is to agree on what are the performance & development objectives for the next review period and the key results committed by the employee to the organization. This review question is arguably the most important aspect of a review. Without this, a review becomes an endeavor in futility.

Review Methods

Firstly, the key review inputs on performance, competencies & development of the current review should be collated. Next the Manager should communicate to the employee on a change in role, if any and the key objectives that the organization expects from the employee moving forward.

Then, there should be a detailed discussion followed by an agreement on what are the key results that the employee can commit towards attaining the objectives and how performance will be measured. There should be absolutely no scope for misunderstanding or “I didn’t know”.

11. Future objectives & key results

Type: Subjective

Is this a popular practice?

Yes, but restricted to KRAs only. Developmental commitments are largely ignored.

Keep in mind

Once the employee completely understands & formally signs off the commitments on future objectives & key results, only then this activity should end.

12. Support, rewards & recognition

Type: Subjective

In return for what the employee commits to deliver to the organization, there should be an equivalent commitment from the organization in terms of support, rewards & recognition. So, this review question deals with employee expectations & what the organization commits to the employee.

Review Methods

For each stated & agreed commitment by the employee to the organization, the employee & Manager should discuss & agree on the support that the organization needs to provide to best attain the key results for the committed objectives. Support can be in terms of manpower, facilities or technology. Past performance of organizational support should be evaluated here and how existing support gaps can be eliminated needs to be addressed.

Next, for attainment of the key results by the employee, the organization needs to negotiate & agree on the rewards & recognition commitments to the employee. Rewards & recognition can be related to compensation, promotions or transfers or maybe the corner office too.

Finally, the organization's offer of rewards for the performance of the employee in the current review period should be evaluated in the context of what was committed and agreed upon by the employee, after negotiations, if any.

12. Support, rewards & recognition

Type: Subjective

Is this a popular practice?

Yes, but it's mostly about rewards & recognition. It's quite rare to find organizational support commitments discussed during this review question.

Keep in mind

Things can get quite tricky with money matters. So, that's why commitments need to be clearly communicated & honored. Otherwise, this is an area which impacts trust most in the employee organization relationship.



CHAPTER FIVE

Review Questions on Feedback



13. Key challenges/unfulfilled promises

Type: Subjective

While commitments are easy to state, there always remains a gap between what was promised & the actual achievement. This review question is to thus reflect on what were the key challenges faced by both the organization & the employee to fulfill their commitments to each other.

Review Methods

During the review, the employee & manager should independently assess the key challenges not overcome & the commitments that were left unmet and the root causes for the same.

Once done, an open discussion should ensue to identify ways to overcome such challenges in the future to be able to better live up to the promised commitments.

Is this a popular practice?

Yes, but seldom are the learnings from this review question taken forward in a structured manner for better outcomes in the future.

Keep in mind

Typically this review question has a sensitive aspect and may roll down to a blame game. So, it's very important to focus on what can be learnt from the past to minimize chances of recurrence in the future.

14. Areas of improvement

Type: Subjective

This review question gives a formal opportunity to both the employee & the organization to express all that can be better about the other. These may be related to job performance, skills, culture, behavior, management or even the air-conditioning!

Review Methods

Starting off, the employee & manager can summarize the key areas of improvement identified across all the key aspects of employee performance listed above and agree on the plan to improve moving forward.

Also, the employee can share his/her opinions on the key hygiene factors that can be bettered by the organization to best enable the employee to perform in the future. Such feedback should be fed back to Management as they plan their Employee satisfaction strategies.

Is this a popular practice?

Yes but sometimes such feedback tends to get lost in the din of day to day business priorities.

Keep in mind

Like children follow parents, employees follow the organizational pattern on what's important or not. So, the organization should lead the way for such feedback to be critically evaluated for implementation. Only then employees can be expected to reciprocate.

15. Serving Customers better

Type: Subjective

Businesses exist for & because of customers. So, this review question gives a great opportunity for anyone to formally voice something to further the purpose of the organization's existence i.e. serving customers better.

Review Methods

In the review, the employee & manager should engage in an open discussion without fear of repercussions & identify all that should be bettered to serve customers and pick from the past specific instances of how things didn't go right and how the employee/organization didn't meet expectations.

The Manager should also highlight to the employee how the individual can make a difference to serve customers better & what are the opportunities available to them that they can avail without the need to seek approval.

Is this a popular practice?

Yes, but not independently as a review question.

Keep in mind

This is not just for the customer facing roles & employees. Even those at the backend with zero customer interaction opportunities should be heard as they are a part of the whole that serves the customer in the end.

Epilogue



There's a global hue & cry on the irrelevance of Annual Performance reviews and how everyone hates them. In reality, the hatred is solely targeted towards the "Annual" aspect of the reviews.

Everyone needs feedback & performance reviews provides a great process to stop, evaluate and correct course wherever necessary.

The truth exists in the details. So whether its quarterly, weekly or even daily reviews, what is more important is how the review is conducted.

Hopefully, this treasure trove of the best 15 review questions will help you along the way to a high performing future.

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15 best review questions and reap
transformational business benefits.

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