

A new approach to employee performance reviews



Performance reviews have been a long-time standard procedure for issuing feedback to employees. But employees and managers alike find this one-way, annual feedback system—based solely on output and meeting predetermined expectations—is ineffective.

Arbinger's 2024 Workplace Trends Report revealed that **only one-third of professionals** say they value, actively participate in, and use performance reviews for improvement. Another 38% find them somewhat helpful, leaving **nearly 30% saying they are not useful or a complete waste of time.**

The fact of the matter is, most organizations' approach to performance reviews is outdated and broken. Some organizations, however, have had luck with a different approach that's transformative for both employees and managers alike. In this post, we'll explore what that looks like and how you can implement something similar on your team.

Developing accountable employees

through performance reviews

Every workplace wants accountable employees. But rather than making it a manager's job to hold people accountable, what you really want to do is develop accountable people. In the long run, this helps everyone. Here's how you do it:

To develop accountable employees, managers and employees must work together to establish clear lines of responsibility. This ensures everyone has a strong understanding of their job roles and responsibilities. Without employee accountability, your workplace will suffer from an accountability gap—which is when people aren't sure what they're responsible for, resulting in unmet expectations, bad behavior, and broken commitments.

Accountable employees feel a sense of ownership over their work—and [research suggests](#) that sense of ownership not only influences an employee's feelings toward their organization; it actually makes us more helpful and generous toward others as well.

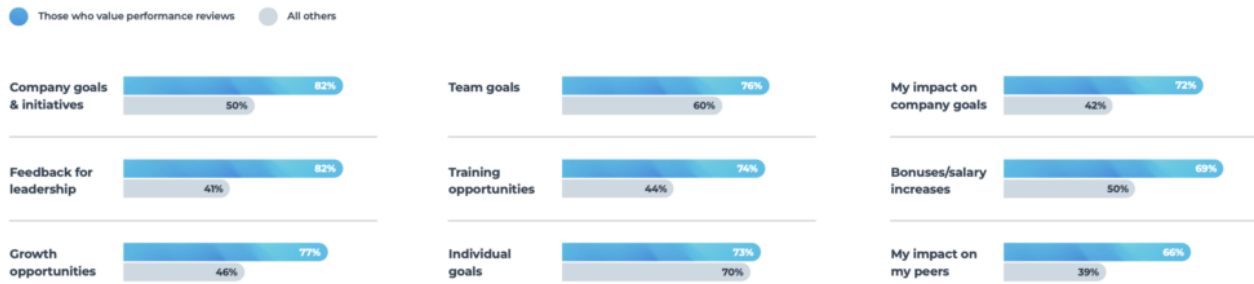
Some ways to foster accountability in employees include:

- Setting clear expectations and goals
- Turning mistakes into learning experiences
- Have performance check-ins often
- Ensure everyone understands their impact

What do high-value performance reviews look like?

Our research found that those who value employee performance reviews follow a different structure than those who don't. Employees who find performance reviews valuable are more likely to be having discussions that include feedback for leadership, training and growth opportunities, and their

impact on both company goals as well as their peers.



Rather than viewing performance reviews as daunting, one-sided discussions during which leaders evaluate their subordinates, we have the opportunity to reframe them into something much more productive for everyone involved.

If you're looking to refresh the way your organization conducts employee performance evaluations, consider integrating the following discussion points into your performance conversations. Here's how to incorporate some of the most impactful discussion areas into your employee reviews:

- **Company goals/initiatives:** Employees feel more connected to company goals and initiatives when they understand the role they play in achieving them. By discussing company goals with employees and helping them understand how exactly their day-to-day work influences them, you'll foster more motivated and [engaged employees](#).
- **Feedback for leadership:** Our survey found that employees who have the opportunity to provide feedback for leadership feel more heard than others. Rather than one-way directions and orders coming from the top, employees feel valued when they can share their ideas and opinions with leadership too.
- **Growth and training opportunities:** Rather than simply telling employees what they're doing right or wrong during reviews, performance reviews are a great time to discuss skill building and training opportunities that will help them get to their desired next step.

- **Impact on peers:** When employees are encouraged to explore their impact on their peers by discussing their goals and challenges, they're more likely to be accountable, helpful, and cooperative when it comes to team projects.

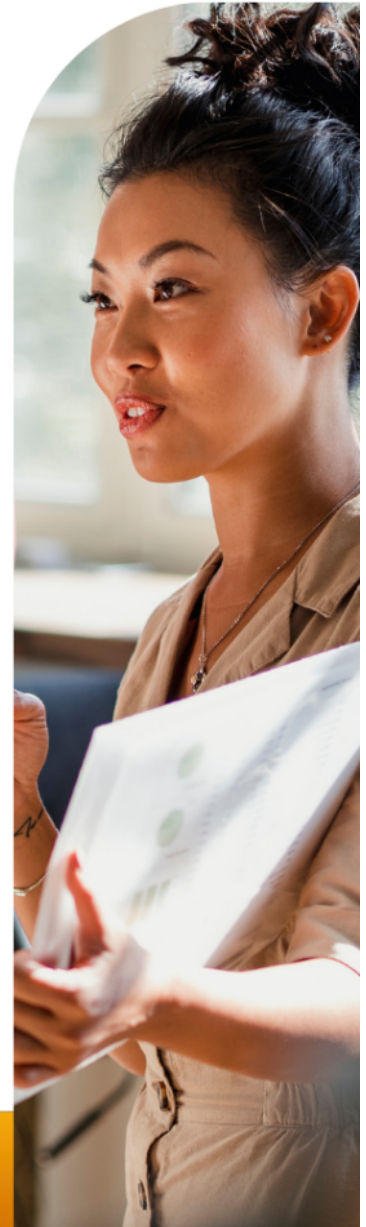
People who discuss their impact on their peers during performance reviews are 2x more likely to rate the performance of their organizations as excellent in several areas than those who do not discuss their impact on their peers in performance review discussions.

Try [Arbinger's Impact Check-In tool](#) as a way to guide your impact check-in conversations with your peers.



What do high-value performance reviews cover?

- Company goals/initiatives
- Feedback for leadership
- Growth opportunities
- Team goals
- Training opportunities
- Individual goals
- My impact on company goals
- Bonuses/salary increases
- My impact on my peers



The power of ongoing feedback

Ongoing feedback is a cornerstone of developing accountable employees. However, less than one-quarter of employees report receiving ongoing feedback about their overall job performance, career and development opportunities, personal development and wellbeing, and compensation.

Percent of those who
have ongoing discussions
about the following:

23%

Personal
development &
wellbeing

19%

Overall job
performance

43%

Career
development
opportunities

41%

Compensation
& benefits

It's also important to think about how often you're having performance discussions, as the frequency of performance evaluations is as important as the content discussed during them. A monthly basis is typically an agreed-upon cadence for both managers and employees. Checking in monthly helps keep everyone on track, while also developing the relationship between manager and employee. The more often check-ins happen, the more likely employees are to be open and honest, knowing that their check-ins are a safe space.

Try this approach to performance reviews

Empower employees to take control of their own performance by enabling them to schedule their own check-in conversations. This opens up a two-way dialogue between managers and employees, rather than having these discussions structured as one-way performance analyses. It's important to talk about both effort *and* impact related to *specific* priorities so employees can understand exactly how they're doing and managers can track their progress.

It's also critical to bring "impact" into the conversation because it helps managers and employees get a more holistic view of performance, rather than just output. For example, an employee might be getting all of their tasks done, but perhaps by doing so, they've gotten in the way of other employees, created challenges for others, and affected other priorities. This is why employees should also be encouraged to have regular [Impact Check-In meetings](#) with their peers. This can help illuminate challenges an employee is creating—oftentimes, that they may not even realize!

This two-pronged approach is how you're going to see actual

results on team performance from reviews, rather than just checking a box.

Here's how you can structure a productive performance conversation:

- Employees prepare for, schedule, and conduct the check-in meeting. We recommend a monthly cadence to keep them as actionable as possible.
- Employees rate themselves and their impact on their peers. We advise employees to meet with teammates regularly to evaluate their impact on others.
- The employee shares their action plan for improvement and/or next steps.
- Both the direct report and their manager have the opportunity to share feedback and gain a better understanding of where they could be more helpful to each other.

Bookmark [this template](#) to try this structure with your team.

We've worked with the team at GVEC to revamp their approach to employee reviews. See how it worked for them here:

Looking ahead

Benefits of employee accountability and empowerment



Arbinger
Institute

A shift in the way your organization conducts performance reviews can be transformational for not only your employees—but your business as a whole. When employees feel a sense of ownership over their own performance and recognize that their manager is invested in their growth, they're much more likely to innovate and outperform.

We dig deeper into this topic (and more) in our 2024 trends report. [Download a copy here.](#)

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