

24 great one-on-one meeting questions - Culture Amp

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Executive Summary

This article, authored by the Director of People Science, Product at Culture Amp, addresses the challenge managers face in conducting effective one-on-one meetings with direct reports. The central argument is that one-on-one meetings are underutilized when they default to operational or task-focused conversations, and that structured variety across topic categories produces better outcomes for employees and managers alike. The article presents a categorized bank of 24 questions spanning six domains: general check-in, alignment, progress, relationship-based, career aspiration, and closing/actionable questions. Key evidence is observational rather than empirical, drawing on the author's professional perspective that managers tend toward either too little or too much structure. The article concludes that effective one-on-ones require flexibility, a cadence of no longer than two weeks between meetings, and a balance between manager-led and employee-led agenda-setting. Implications focus on broadening the scope of one-on-one conversations to include wellbeing, career aspirations, and interpersonal relationships alongside task management.

Key Insights

1. Managers commonly default to operational or task-focused questions in one-on-ones, neglecting topics such as alignment, wellbeing, career aspirations, and interpersonal relationships.
2. Effective one-on-one meetings circulate across multiple topic categories over time rather than repeating the same structure each session, with flexibility to follow the employee's needs.
3. Career aspiration conversations are frequently deferred to annual reviews or avoided entirely, despite the article's position that they benefit from frequent, even weekly, discussion.

Practical Takeaways

- One-on-one meetings can be structured around six recurring topic areas — check-in, alignment, progress, relationships, career aspirations, and closing actions — to ensure broader and more consistent coverage over time.
- A cadence of no longer than two weeks between one-on-one touchpoints is presented as a baseline, with the option of combining brief informal check-ins with deeper monthly conversations.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article provides a clearly organized, accessible question taxonomy that covers a wider range of employee experience dimensions than is typical of operational one-on-one guidance. The six-category structure offers practical scaffolding for new managers. **Limitations:** The article presents no

empirical data, citations, or referenced studies to support its claims about what makes one-on-ones effective. Assertions such as 'managers tend to have either too little or too much structure' are stated without evidence. The source is Culture Amp, a performance management software vendor, creating an inherent promotional context even when the product itself is not explicitly mentioned. The article does not acknowledge variation in organizational contexts, team sizes, or cultural norms that may affect the applicability of its guidance. The framing is prescriptive in tone despite the absence of research backing.

Organizational Practice

The article describes the practice of structured, recurring one-on-one meetings between managers and direct reports, with agendas rotating across operational, alignment, wellbeing, career, relationship, and closing topics. It also references the use of engagement surveys as a trigger for alignment-focused conversations, and informal in-the-moment feedback as a complement to formal one-on-ones.

Strategic Implications

The article reflects a broader trend toward expanding the scope of manager-employee conversations beyond performance tasks to include employee wellbeing, career development, and organizational alignment. The emphasis on frequent career discussions — potentially weekly — signals a shift away from annual review cycles as the primary vehicle for development conversations. The framing of the manager as coach and feedback-seeker (asking for upward feedback) is consistent with emerging flat-feedback and continuous development models in PMS design.

Validation Status: passed
