

Performance reviews: What employees don't tell HR - hcamag.com

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Executive Summary

This article reports on findings from a KickResume poll of 1,365 employees globally, examining honesty and candour in workplace self-performance reviews. The central argument is that most employees engage in some form of self-presentation management during reviews, with 71% admitting to less than full honesty. Key findings indicate that employees most commonly make themselves appear slightly better than reality (38%), focus disproportionately on strengths (18%), or suppress authentic feedback on sensitive topics including manager performance (36%), career intentions (23%), salary expectations (22%), and personal struggles (18%). Only 29% described themselves as fully candid. The report positions this behaviour as a response to perceived unwritten workplace norms rather than deliberate deception. Despite this honesty gap, employees express genuine desire for meaningful review processes, with 39% indicating that value depends on how managers act on feedback rather than the review form itself. KickResume CEO Peter Duris frames the solution as treating performance reviews as relationship-building tools, emphasising personalised manager follow-through as the critical factor in review effectiveness.

Key Insights

1. 71% of employees admit to some degree of dishonesty in self-reviews, with the most common behaviour being presenting themselves slightly more favourably than reality.
2. The topics employees most avoid disclosing — manager feedback, real career goals, salary expectations, and personal struggles — mirror the broadest sources of workplace tension and perceived risk.
3. 39% of employees believe the value of performance reviews depends not on the self-review process itself but on what managers do with the information afterwards, elevating managerial follow-through as the pivotal variable.

Practical Takeaways

- Organisations using self-review processes may be receiving systematically skewed input, with employees self-censoring on topics most relevant to workforce planning, retention risk, and manager effectiveness.
- Managerial response quality and personalisation appear to be the primary determinants of employee perception of review value, suggesting that process design alone does not drive engagement with performance systems.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article surfaces a rarely quantified phenomenon — the gap between self-review candour and actual employee experience — and provides granular breakdowns of both the nature of dishonesty and the topics avoided. The qualitative framing around unwritten workplace norms adds contextual depth. **Limitations:** The poll was conducted by KickResume, a resume-building platform with a commercial interest in positioning performance reviews critically; this introduces potential bias in both question framing and interpretation. The sample of 1,365 employees described as 'global' lacks demographic or sectoral breakdown, limiting generalisability. The article does not report methodology, margin of error, or how 'globally' is defined. The jump from descriptive poll data to prescriptive conclusions about relationship-building is unsupported by causal evidence. The CEO commentary reinforces the vendor's brand positioning rather than offering independent analysis.

Organizational Practice

Organisations conduct year-end self-performance reviews in which employees complete structured forms reflecting on their own performance. Managers receive this input and are expected to respond, though the degree of personalisation and follow-through varies. Employees report tailoring their responses based on perceived unwritten norms about acceptable topics, particularly avoiding candid feedback on managers, salary, career intentions, and personal difficulties.

Strategic Implications

The data points to a structural reliability problem in self-review inputs that may affect the accuracy of talent assessments, succession planning, and engagement diagnostics built on review data. The finding that managerial follow-through — not the review instrument itself — drives perceived value has implications for where organisations invest in performance management capability building. The pattern of topic avoidance around manager feedback and career intentions suggests that self-review data may systematically underrepresent flight risk signals and leadership effectiveness concerns.

Validation Status: passed
