

# HR Business Partner interview questions

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## What to expect

Interviews for HR business partner roles focus on your ability to influence managers, handle complex people issues, and use data to shape workforce decisions. You will usually meet both HR leaders and the business leaders you would support, so expect questions that test your commercial awareness and your judgement under pressure.

- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask you to describe how you have handled performance, conflict, restructures or stakeholder resistance in the past.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations where you must decide how to respond to a manager, a restructure or an engagement problem.
- **Technical:** Questions on Australian employment law, enterprise agreements, HR metrics and HRIS tools.
- **Stakeholder management:** Questions about how you build credibility with business leaders and push back when needed.
- **Strategic:** Questions about workforce planning, capability gaps and aligning people plans with business goals.

The process typically starts with a phone screen with a recruiter or HR lead, then a first interview with the HR manager and the business unit leader you would support. That may include a scenario or case exercise. Final interviews often involve a senior stakeholder or a panel, and may include a short presentation on a workforce challenge. Reference checks and sometimes psychometric testing follow.

## 1. Tell me about a time you advised a manager on a performance issue that was not improving. How did you handle it?

### Why they ask

Performance management is core to the role. They want to see that you can balance legal compliance, manager support and employee fairness.

### How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and the manager's concern, the action you took to investigate and advise, and the outcome. Finish with what you learned about managing similar cases.

### Example answer

*"In my current role, a team leader came to me about an employee who was missing deadlines and affecting the team's output. I sat down with the leader to review the evidence and the position description, then we mapped out a performance improvement plan with clear, measurable expectations. I coached the leader on how to deliver the feedback and we scheduled weekly check-ins. Over the next six weeks the employee's work improved and the leader felt more confident handling performance conversations. The key was making sure the process was fair and documented, while giving the manager the tools to lead it themselves."*

## 2. Our engagement scores in one division have dropped. How would you approach this?

### Why they ask

They want to see how you use data and pulse surveys to diagnose issues and work with leaders on solutions, not just run a survey.

### How to structure your answer

Walk through a process: gather data, talk to managers and staff, identify root causes, co-design actions, measure again. Show judgement about confidentiality and trust.

#### Example answer

*"First I would look at the pulse survey results by team and by question to see where the drop is concentrated. Then I would meet with the division leader to understand any recent changes, and hold a few focus groups or skip-level conversations to hear what is really happening. I would avoid jumping to a fix before I understand the cause. Once I had a clear picture, I would work with the leader to prioritise two or three actions, such as improving communication around priorities or recognising good work more consistently. Then we would set a checkpoint to see whether the next pulse survey shows improvement."*

### **3. How do you handle a situation where a business leader wants to make a decision that conflicts with HR policy or the enterprise agreement?**

#### Why they ask

HR business partners often need to push back while maintaining the relationship. They want to see you can be both a trusted advisor and a compliance safeguard.

#### How to structure your answer

Use a situation-behaviour-impact structure plus reflection. Describe how you would raise concerns, offer alternatives, and escalate if needed.

#### Example answer

*"I would start by making sure I understand the leader's goal and the business pressure they are under. Then I would explain the specific policy or agreement clause that creates a risk, and what the consequences could be. I would offer alternative options that meet the business need within the rules, such as a different restructure approach or a fixed-term arrangement. If the leader still wanted to proceed, I would set out the risks clearly and escalate to my HR leader. In one case, a manager wanted to change rosters without consultation. I worked with them to design a consultation process that still delivered the coverage they needed, and we avoided a dispute."*

### **4. Tell me about a restructure or change initiative you supported. What was your role and what did you do to keep things on track?**

#### Why they ask

Change management is a major part of the role. They want to see you can plan, communicate and support managers through uncertainty.

#### How to structure your answer

STAR with emphasis on your specific actions and the measurable or observable outcomes, such as redeployment or retention.

#### Example answer

*"I supported a restructure in a professional services division where two teams were merged. My role was to work with the division leader on the change plan, prepare managers for conversations with their staff, and make sure the consultation process met our enterprise agreement. I ran briefing sessions for managers, provided scripts and FAQs, and set up a redeployment register for affected employees. We managed to redeploy most people into new roles and the merged team was operating within three months. The main lesson was to over-communicate and to give managers the support they needed to lead the change."*

### **5. How do you use HR metrics to influence a business unit's people strategy?**

#### Why they ask

They want a business partner who is comfortable with data and can turn it into a compelling story for leaders.

### How to structure your answer

Explain your approach to data, then give a specific example. Use a simple what-how-so what structure.

#### Example answer

*"I start by looking at the metrics that matter most to the business unit, such as turnover, time to fill, engagement and diversity. I then dig into the trends and compare them with the rest of the organisation or with previous periods. For example, I noticed that one team had higher voluntary turnover than others, so I looked at exit interview themes and pulse survey comments. It turned out that new starters were not getting enough support in their first three months. I presented the findings to the division leader with a recommendation to strengthen onboarding, and we introduced a buddy system and a 30-day check-in. Turnover in that team dropped over the next two quarters."*

## 6. Give an example of how you have coached a leader on conflict resolution within their team.

### Why they ask

Coaching leaders is a core business partner activity. They want to see you can build capability rather than solve every problem yourself.

### How to structure your answer

STAR with a focus on the coaching conversation and the leader's development. Include what you did and what changed.

#### Example answer

*"A manager I supported had two team members in a long-running dispute that was affecting the whole team. Instead of stepping in to mediate myself, I coached the manager on how to have a one-on-one with each person, listen to their concerns, and agree on some ground rules for working together. I gave them a framework for the conversation and debriefed with them afterwards. The manager felt more confident, and the two employees reached a workable agreement. The team's dynamic improved and the manager later handled a similar issue without my help."*