

Engineering Manager interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for Engineering Manager roles test whether a candidate can hold technical credibility with the team while also handling budgets, deadlines and people issues. Expect a mix of technical walk-throughs, behavioural questions about past projects, and scenarios that test judgement when technical quality and delivery pressure conflict.

- **Process / technical review:** Questions asking you to walk through how you actually review designs, drawings or engineering outputs for quality and compliance.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about specific past situations involving budgets, deadlines, or managing a team member, usually answered with STAR.
- **Scenario / judgement:** Hypothetical situations testing how you'd balance competing pressures, such as a resistant team or a slipping deadline.
- **Client-facing / communication:** Questions about how you translate technical detail into updates for clients or senior management.
- **Tools and systems:** Questions checking practical familiarity with project management and design software used day to day.

Most Engineering Manager interviews run as a panel, often including a senior engineering lead and someone from HR or operations. Expect an opening discussion of your background and past projects, followed by scenario or behavioural questions, and often a technical discussion of a project you've led in detail. Some organisations add a case-style exercise, such as reviewing a sample design or budget report on the spot.

1. Walk me through how you review a set of engineering drawings or designs before sign-off.

Why they ask

This checks whether you have a real, repeatable process for quality and compliance review rather than a vague sense of 'checking things over'.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a step-by-step walkthrough: what you check first, what standards or codes you reference, who else you involve, and what happens when you find an issue.

Example answer

"I start by checking the drawings against the project brief and the relevant standards, usually the NCC and any AS/NZS codes that apply to that discipline. I look for consistency between drawings first, then check load calculations or specifications against what's been modelled. If I find an issue, I raise it directly with the engineer or drafter responsible rather than just marking it up and moving on, because it usually surfaces a pattern worth addressing across the whole set. Once everything checks out I sign off and log it so there's a record of what was reviewed and by whom."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a project budget that was heading over forecast.

Why they ask

Budgeting and forecasting is a core part of this role, and interviewers want evidence you catch problems early rather than after the fact.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and the budget pressure, the specific action you took, and the result for the project.

Example answer

"On one project, cost tracking showed our spend on a particular workstream running ahead of the milestone schedule. I sat down with the team lead to understand whether it was a timing issue or a genuine overrun, and it turned out some rework was driving extra hours. I reallocated resourcing from a workstream that was ahead of schedule and flagged the risk to senior management early, with options for how we could recover the position. We brought the budget back in line without needing to cut scope, and management appreciated having the issue raised before it became a bigger problem."

3. How would you handle a situation where a senior engineer on your team consistently misses deadlines despite producing technically strong work?

Why they ask

This tests people management and judgement, since Engineering Managers often have to balance technical respect for someone's ability against delivery pressure.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a judgement-under-pressure response: state your immediate approach, the conversation you'd have, and how you'd follow up.

Example answer

"I'd first have a direct but private conversation to understand what's actually causing the delays, whether it's workload, unclear priorities, or something outside work. If it's a workload issue, I'd look at rebalancing tasks across the team. If it's about how they're managing their own time, I'd agree on clearer milestones and check in more regularly rather than waiting until the deadline to find out there's a problem. I'd also make sure the rest of the team isn't absorbing the cost of those delays without me noticing."

4. Describe how you'd introduce a new safety protocol to a team that's resistant to changing how they work.

Why they ask

Process improvement and safety compliance are explicit parts of this role, and resistance to change is common on established engineering teams.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a process description: how you'd introduce the change, get buy-in, and monitor whether it's actually being followed.

Example answer

"I'd start by explaining the reason for the change, ideally tied to a specific incident or gap rather than just a compliance requirement handed down from above. I'd involve a couple of senior team members in shaping how it gets rolled out, since protocols land better when the team feels some ownership over them. After it's introduced I'd check in during site walks or team meetings to see whether it's actually being followed, and adjust it if parts of it aren't practical in the field."

5. How do you communicate a technical setback to senior management or a client without it becoming a credibility problem?

Why they ask

This role sits between engineering delivery and stakeholder management, so interviewers want to know you can deliver bad news clearly and constructively.

How to structure your answer

Structure your answer around clarity and framing: what you lead with, how much technical detail you include, and how you present the path forward.

Example answer

"I lead with the impact on the project, not the technical detail, because that's what the client or executive actually needs to decide on. I explain what happened in plain terms, what it means for the schedule or budget, and then move straight to the options for addressing it. I've found that clients respond much better to a setback raised early with a clear plan than to one that gets buried until it's unavoidable."

6. What's your experience with project management platforms like MS Project or Jira, and how do you use them day to day?

Why they ask

Familiarity with these tools is listed as a core requirement, and interviewers want practical detail, not just a name-drop.

How to structure your answer

Answer directly and specifically: which tools you've used, for what purpose, and one concrete example of how you used them to track delivery.

Example answer

"I've used MS Project mainly for scheduling and tracking dependencies across larger projects, and Jira for managing day-to-day tasks and design revisions within the team. I set up boards so the team can see what's in review versus what's approved, which cuts down on status-update meetings because people can see progress themselves. For budget tracking I've paired that with dedicated resource planning tools rather than relying on the project management platform alone."