Conducting an Engagement Survey

Although there are distinct advantages to conducting regular employee engagement surveys online, there can also be risks. Here are are some of the main advantages and considerations to conducting employee engagement surveys online.

Advantages

- **Identify problems** - Surveys can be very effective in identifying problem areas before they become serious, especially those that are hidden from senior management.

- **Working Environment** - From something small like a broken chair to the more serious problem of sick building syndrome that can result in employees experiencing headaches; eye, nose, and throat irritation; a dry cough; dry or itchy skin; dizziness and nausea; and difficulty in concentrating. Surveys allow environmental problems to be identified in a measured and controlled manner.

- **Remuneration and benefits** - Measure and monitor how satisfied personnel are with their remuneration and benefits.

- **Mood and morale** - Provides a simple but effective method to measure and monitor the mood and morale of an organization.

- **Benchmark** - In the same way that an organization will consider their financial position by comparison with previous years, so the regular use of online surveys will allow an organization to monitor and measure their progress and development in non-financial terms.

- **Processes and procedures** - As businesses evolve some of the traditional processes and procedures can become antiquated, personnel are often the first to know and the last to be asked. Businesses evolve and the business processes need to be regularly re-aligned.

- **Training** - Lack of proper training is a common cause of disengagement among employees and can lead to more serious problems such as stress.

- **Communication** - For an organization to run efficiently good internal and external communications are essential, surveys can provide a method to help organizations to monitor and measure how well an organization communicates.

- **Goals and Objectives** - Surveys can measure and monitor the extent that the personnel are aligned with the senior management's business goals and objectives.

- **Cost Effective** - Using an online survey service such as www.surveygalaxy.com, Talentmap.com or zoomerang.com surveys are quick and easy to create, simple to deploy and will provide real-time results.

- **Compliance** - To properly comply with an ever increasing array of regulations the modern organization needs to be able to disseminate information throughout the organization and ensure, through records, that the information has been received, and importantly, understood. Online surveys provide organization with a cost effective method to meet many of their obligations.

- **Keeping the Initiative** - It is always better for management to ask than be told. By conducting regular employee surveys management are able to keep the initiative in trying to identify problems that may otherwise manifest into demands.

Considerations

- **Management Backing** - A survey that is both sanctioned and has the support of senior management will go some way in ensuring that any action required, based on the survey findings, will be implemented.

- **Ask the right questions** - Consider careful the questions being asked. If employees feel that the survey is just trying to tick the right boxes the survey could backfire.
    - A survey that is to be conducted periodically should try and ask questions that will provide senior management with an overall health check of the organization.
    - Avoid questions that will only apply to specific departments or personnel. If some areas of the organization require detailed investigation consider running separate one-off surveys that can be targeted at specific personnel.
    - Evaluate your questions to be sure they aren't leading to a desired result, vague, or open to interpretation.

- **Incentive** - Most employees will feel that by being able to give their opinions that they are already stakeholders in the exercise and will be happy to participate in the survey as they will expect to benefit from the process.
    - However, some incentive may help improve the overall response rate or could be used to encourage early participation.
    - Smaller incentives could be handed out to all employees or all participating employees could be entered into a lottery to receive a more substantial prize.
    - Don't let employees self-select for participation. Ask all employees to participate and continue to send reminders. A response of 65 – 80% is considered average but shoot for over 80% for a more thorough result.

- **Anonymous** - The decision to allow respondents to remain anonymous or not needs careful consideration. A survey that is conducted anonymously may allow employees to be more candid, however, anonymity may encourage some individuals to make wild accusations that cannot be substantiated and cause considerable concern.
    - Where survey respondents are known there is the opportunity to chase for surveys that have not been completed and also to follow up on some issues directly with those employees who have raised them as problems.

Risks of Conducting an Engagement Survey

- Managers dismiss results - results and comments are justified and ignored
- Ignoring the 'warts' – the organization dismissing poor results, especially if normative data is similar
- Non-action – lack of post-survey action results in cynicism and disinterest in any future attempt to survey
- Lack of communication – address what is being worked on and acknowledge what is being pushed off until later
- Blaming employees for results – *'It's not a management issue, we just have bad employees'*

    - Communicate that, while employee responses are confidential, the cumulative data gathered will be shared and used to improve the workplace

- **Comments** - Keep free text comments to a minimum because they are difficult and time consuming to measure and analyze.
    - Consider limiting free text comments to one at the end of the survey or, in the case of surveys that are not being conducted anonymously, allow for a post-survey follow-up to obtain more information where additional and more specific detail is required.

Asking Demographic Questions?

Asking demographic questions is more than being nosey - these questions serve two main purposes:

1. To see how closely the sample replicates the known population. The more closely the demographic distribution of survey respondents matches the population, the more confidence you can have in the data.
2. To allow analysis of sub-groups of those responding to the survey.

It is this second purpose, analysis of sub-groups, which provides the most utility. If the sample size is small (less than 100 or so), this cannot be done. However, with larger sample sizes, an analysis of sub-groups can tell you things that would be missed by looking at the aggregate data. For example, you might find that 10% of employees would rate the health care plan provided by your firm as "poor";. You might be tempted to conclude that you do not have a major problem in this area. However, if you were to drill down into the data and find that 30% of employees with children rated the health care plan as "poor," you would have a potentially serious issue on your hands.

Questionnaire length usually limits the number of demographic questions you can include in your survey. The particular items you choose to include will be influenced by the type of industry you are in and the composition of your work force. Below is a list of the types of demographic questions you should consider including in your employee engagement questionnaire.

- Age
- Sex
- Marital status
- Length of time employed by the firm
- Position
- Department and/or business line
- Family information

It is not necessary to include all of the above questions in the survey. The key in selecting the items to include is determining, to the extent possible, the variable that you believe will segment the population in a manner such that the different segments will have different needs and/or feelings about the organization.

When NOT to use
Demographic questions:

1. **When the sample size is too small –** When the sample size is very small (fewer than 50 responses), you really can't slice the data and see statistically significant differences. Thus, you derive no benefit yet you risk losing responses (or obtaining less honest responses).
2. **When there have been issues about management trust –** If you know that there have been problems regarding the employees' trust in management, it may be best to abstain from asking questions which employees might fear can be used to identify them.
3. **When the survey is too long –**If you have added considerable length to a survey in the course of asking traditional organization-performance questions, a good place to cut additional length is the demographic section. However, before you do this, you might want to take a second look at the questionnaire to determine whether cuts can be made elsewhere.

Evaluating Employee Comments

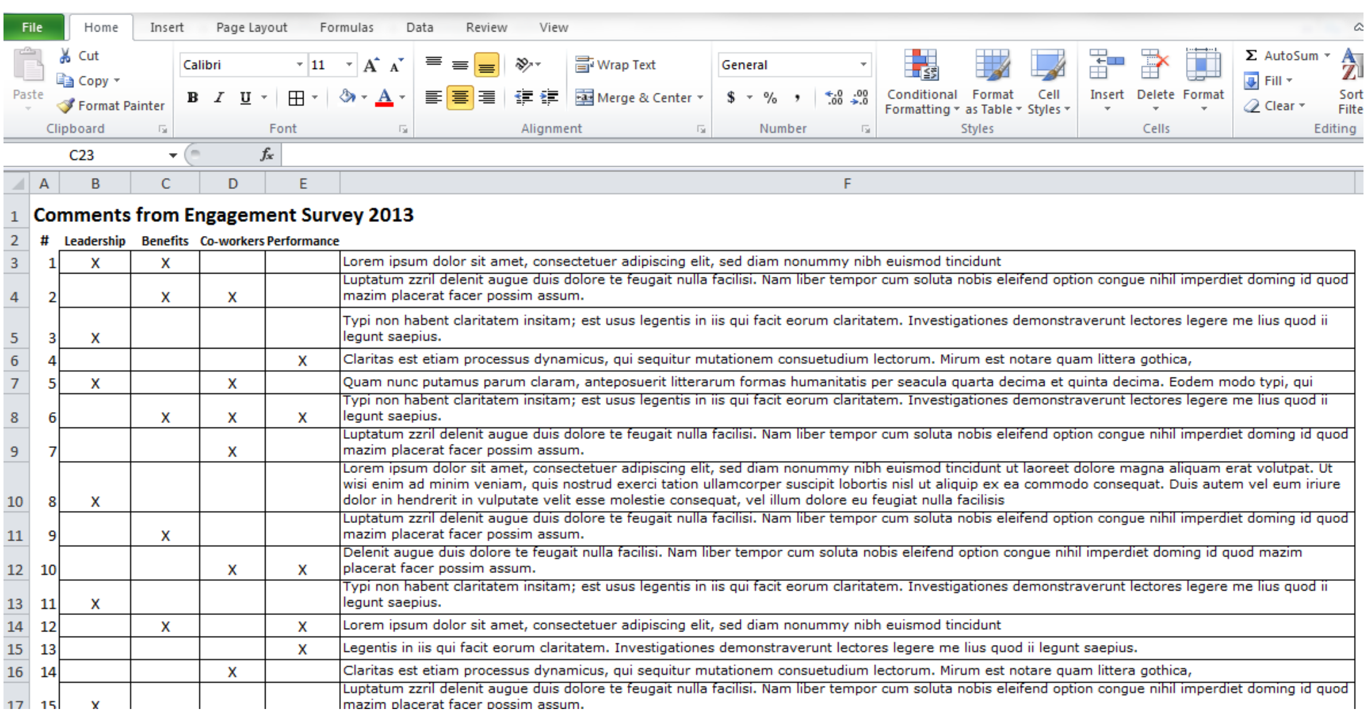
Many employee engagement surveys give employees the opportunity to provide comments. Evaluating each comment as it is returned will be helpful in understanding the needs of individual employees. However, you'll gain even more information if you review the comments in batches and attempt to uncover patterns in the responses through "coding" them.

> ***Coding*** is the process of putting consistent labels on survey comments in order for them to be sorted into categories. Common codes are:
>
> - Compensation
> - Benefits
> - Leadership
> - Relationships
> - Customers/clients
>
> Codes are determined by comments made on the survey and categorized in the review process

Once you have completed "coding" the comments, you can look for patterns. You would commonly see many of the same things identified as issues in the quantitative portion of the survey report (if you have a quantitative section). Often, the comments will provide you with more specific information about how to fix problems identified in the quantitative portion of a survey. However, it is not uncommon to uncover completely new issues by coding and reviewing comments. If this occurs, consideration should be given to modifying future questionnaires to specifically ask about such issues.

If you see a lot of references to particular employees, you should consider including employee names in both the positive and the negative comment coding sheets. You could then put a tick mark in the appropriate column for each positive or negative mention of an employee. If you do this, be sure to also place a tick mark in the appropriate "issues" category as well.

If you have many comments to code, it is helpful to use a data base program or a spreadsheet (see simple sample below). Rows should represent each respondent and columns can represent categories. This approach also makes it easy to calculate what percentage of respondents mentioned items in a particular category.



Comments from Engagement Survey 2013

#	Leadership	Benefits	Co-workers	Performance	
1	X	X			Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt
2		X	X		Luptatum zzril delenit augue duis dolore te feugait nulla facilisi. Nam liber tempor cum soluta nobis eleifend option congue nihil imperdiet doming id quod mazim placerat facer possim assum.
3	X				Typi non habent claritatem insitam; est usus legentis in iis qui facit eorum claritatem. Investigationes demonstraverunt lectores legere me lius quod ii legunt saepius.
4				X	Claritas est etiam processus dynamicus, qui sequitur mutationem consuetudium lectorum. Mirum est notare quam littera gothica,
5	X		X		Quam nunc putamus parum claram, anteposuerit litterarum formas humanitatis per seacula quarta decima et quinta decima. Eodem modo typi, qui
6		X	X	X	Typi non habent claritatem insitam; est usus legentis in iis qui facit eorum claritatem. Investigationes demonstraverunt lectores legere me lius quod ii legunt saepius.
7			X		Luptatum zzril delenit augue duis dolore te feugait nulla facilisi. Nam liber tempor cum soluta nobis eleifend option congue nihil imperdiet doming id quod mazim placerat facer possim assum.
8	X				Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisis
9		X			Luptatum zzril delenit augue duis dolore te feugait nulla facilisi. Nam liber tempor cum soluta nobis eleifend option congue nihil imperdiet doming id quod mazim placerat facer possim assum.
10			X	X	Delenit augue duis dolore te feugait nulla facilisi. Nam liber tempor cum soluta nobis eleifend option congue nihil imperdiet doming id quod mazim placerat facer possim assum.
11	X				Typi non habent claritatem insitam; est usus legentis in iis qui facit eorum claritatem. Investigationes demonstraverunt lectores legere me lius quod ii legunt saepius.
12		X		X	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt
13				X	Legentis in iis qui facit eorum claritatem. Investigationes demonstraverunt lectores legere me lius quod ii legunt saepius.
14			X		Claritas est etiam processus dynamicus, qui sequitur mutationem consuetudium lectorum. Mirum est notare quam littera gothica,
15	X				Luptatum zzril delenit augue duis dolore te feugait nulla facilisi. Nam liber tempor cum soluta nobis eleifend option congue nihil imperdiet doming id quod mazim placerat facer possim assum.

The Value of Normative Data in Employee Survey Analysis

Employee ratings of an organization's strengths and weaknesses can identify areas upon which to focus in order to increase employee engagement. Indeed, if you had no other data, you would still be in a position to make decisions about what to do in response to employee survey results.

You will be able to make much smarter decisions, however, with additional normative data. For example, it's not uncommon to discover half a dozen attributes which receive relatively poor ratings in comparison to others in the survey. Or, on the flip side, you may see some very high results on particular question.

Normative data shows where you stand in comparison with many other organizations on the same attributes. A case in point -- employee ratings of salaries and wages are substantially lower than their ratings of, say, corporate communications or quality of supervision. Looks like a money problem, but is it? It may be that, compared to other organizations, your wage and salary ratings are on the upper end of the scale. And your apparently satisfactory communications ratings are actually lower than those of other organizations.

That kind of information is precisely what norms are designed to provide. Without that information, you can't really tell where you stand, and you may waste resources fixing "problems" that simply reflect prevailing views of employees in general, and missing an opportunity to address the real areas in which your organization lags behind others.

This is not to say that a low rating in both your survey *and* the normative data justifies your results. Employers of choice know that it’s not good enough to be as good as the competition – they want to be better.

Reporting Results

After a company has completed an employee engagement survey, the results must be communicated to three key constituencies:

- Executive leadership
- Management
- Employees

Executive Leadership

The executive leadership team will most likely be involved with the survey process from start and will be involved in the initial review and coding of results. All senior leaders should be involved in reviewing the initial report and discussing steps for cascading the information throughout the organization and the strategy for action planning.

Management

Communication to management is the next step. The goals of this communication should be to:

- Remind management of the purpose of the survey
- Communicate the findings
- Obtain buy-in that the findings are correct
- Begin the process of determining what policies and practices, if any, need to be changed to improve employee engagement

The first two items are fairly easy to accomplish through a standard presentation. The third bullet, obtaining buy-in, is a key aspect of the management communication. You may be able to obtain buy-in that the findings are correct in a standard presentation (or management reading) of results, but the success of obtaining buy-in can be problematic, particularly if the findings communicate something management doesn't want to hear.

Employees

At this point, delivery of the information to the information can be done in two ways:

- Cascading through the management level to the employees (message risks some dilution – not everyone will tell the same story)
- Delivered directly by senior leaders (a more consistent message but cuts out the connection to managers and supervisors)

Whichever method you chose to use, here are some tips for communication:

- Create talking points to provide a consistent message
- Communicate openly about the results – the good, the bad, and the ugly
- Offer the opportunity for questions
- Explain next steps – what actions you plan to take (remember, you can't fix everything and your employees know it)

Lastly, part of your action plan should involve the employees in an active role. They've told you what needs attention, they should be a part of the solution as well.