

Creating a Feedback Culture: Using Survey Software to

Drive Employee Engagement

By Jakob Franzen, Inquisite

By providing a platform for employees to share their thoughts and opinions, both positive and negative, companies can create a feedback culture that leads to a more involved, loyal and engaged workforce. This type of culture will also lead to increased employee retention. According to recent data from Aberdeen Group, a research firm focused on the global technology-driven value chain, the fourth-highest ranked competitive threat facing organizations is people retention. There are currently various methods available to help create a feedback culture platform, including one-on-one interviews and open forum discussions. So how do companies decide which is the best fit for them? For many businesses, survey software is the answer.

Today, software exists that makes the creation, distribution and analysis of surveys a point-and-click exercise for

even the largest enterprise. This software gives forward-thinking HR executives the ability to uncover and understand employees' personal attitudes and even correlate those attitudes with professional habits, driving performance in the workforce.

The same software can also act as an early warning system, allowing HR professionals to identify simmering problems — such as conflict between employees, low staff morale or individual managers experiencing an inordinate amount of employee dissension — before they boil over. The software can also assist with the assessment of individual team member and overall team performance.

But whatever the content of the feedback, there is no question that survey software gives employees a valuable means of communication that, when used correctly, can create a

more engaged, productive workforce. Aberdeen also notes in recent reports that employee engagement is a component of people retention that is growing in importance and has implications across the talent management chain.

Companies that successfully use survey software to drive organizational change and increase engagement include Intuit, which is frequently

QUICK LOOK

- ➔ The three keys to effectively using survey software are: stop thinking survey, start thinking dialogue; pick the right metrics, and make them visible; and focus on action, not just analysis.
- ➔ The true value of the information an organization gathers is in the company's ability to make better decisions based on the feedback collected.
- ➔ Organizations interested in implementing survey software to create a feedback culture should look for a solution that is simple, powerful and flexible.



named one of Fortune's Most Admired Companies. Each year in November the company launches an annual employee survey that consists of 62 questions, including five engagement questions. The following spring, a pulse survey is launched to measure the impact of action plans implemented as a result of the annual survey.

The pulse survey process seeks to enable leaders to understand the voice of the employee year-round, said Phil Warden, Intuit's workforce research program manager. Taking action on the results is embedded in how the organization operates.

Data collected from the annual employee and pulse surveys drives

effectively using survey software in your organization, the associated benefits and a few tips regarding the selection and implementation process.

Key No. 1: Stop thinking surveys, start thinking dialogue.

To build a feedback culture, your organization has to stop thinking of surveying as a single transaction collecting snapshots of information, as single-use surveys do not build a continuous conversation. Such surveys are traditionally unrelated and are not stored in a manner that provides any true insight. Your organization instead needs to start thinking of surveying as a form of dialogue. Perpetual surveys

papers highlight a recently identified talent management trend — the shift in focus from acquiring new talent to developing and retaining existing talent. Dialogue within an organization helps with retention of existing talent.

Establishing a persistent, measurable conversation with employees is the goal of the feedback culture. The saying, "Any process worth doing is worth measuring" reaffirms this concept.

A survey software solution with a panel management capability can help manage the survey process by segmenting populations, by department for example, to ensure that only relevant parties receive the survey and that specific panel members are not oversurveyed.

There are endless ways to begin a dialogue. Depending on what a company hopes to uncover with a survey, the questions will vary greatly. Asking employees for their feedback, regardless of the specific questions, is how you begin the dialogue.

Key No. 2: Pick the right metrics and make them visible.

All organizations strive to make better decisions. However, it is not unusual for companies to find it hard to act on data collected.

Organizations that embrace a feedback culture typically focus on a limited set of predefined key metrics and make them visible throughout the organization. Be sure to select metrics you can actually act upon. An example of an actionable metric would be the measurement of employees' opinions regarding their benefits. If satisfaction rates dropped below a predefined mark, then the company would investigate other options. Remember, don't ask a question if you are not prepared to do something with the answer.

Another example of picking a metric and making it visible can be found in

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Intuit's one- and three-year planning process. It also drives meaningful changes. For example, survey data showed that scores for career development and mobility were lower than anticipated for three consecutive years. As a result of monitoring this measurement and its impact, the company now has dedicated resources to drive the corporate strategy for talent management and career development. After two years, Warden said there is a growing career mobility and development mind-set in the organization.

The remainder of this article is devoted to describing the keys to

are valuable in that they lay the foundation of a dialogue, which is needed to create a feedback culture. Dialogue between employee and manager is extremely important because it shows the employee that his/her voice matters, builds trust within the organization, strengthens the working relationship and opens the lines of communication. It is also important for management because it provides a platform for employees to share their perspectives, ideas and issues, which can lead to a lower turnover rate, increased productivity and improved business processes. Current Aberdeen research

the Intuit example. When scores for career development and mobility were lower than anticipated, the company decided to dedicate resources to drive the corporate strategy on this front.

A survey software solution with role-based access can also help make certain metrics visible. For example, the person responsible for managing surveys has the ability to view and forward pertinent results to appropriate management, who can then share the results with the appropriate team members — delivering the right information at the right time to the right people.

Key No. 3: Focus on action, not just analysis.

The true value of the information an organization gathers is in the company's ability to make better decisions based on the feedback collected. The commitment to act on the information gathered sets organizations with feedback cultures apart from organizations that simply perform surveys to create the appearance that employee input matters. Sophisticated survey systems support taking action by offering interactive reporting with drill-down features for segmenting data, which helps HR professionals identify exactly where action is needed. Being able to rapidly manipulate, filter and drill-down on data collected by simply pointing and clicking a mouse makes interpretation of survey results much faster and easier. The ability to customize reports and even report views to see only the information that's most important for the task at hand also reduces the time to action. Other survey features, such as triggers for survey deployments to the right people at the right time and alerts that deliver survey response data to individuals who can take action, can further increase efficiencies and support the establishment of a feedback culture.

With data in hand, companies can readily translate analysis into action by

sharing key findings with the respondent pool and discussing next steps, communicating specific actions and acting upon them, or following up on specific issues raised, either individually or with the larger group.

Companies focused on action are able to prioritize, target and plan more efficiently, particularly with respect to aligning individual satisfaction and/or performance with corporate goals because employees know what they are working toward and why. Employee retention, performance and engagement are supported in action-oriented feedback cultures.

Getting Started


Organizations interested in implementing survey software to create a feedback culture should look for a solution that is:

- **Simple** — Driving faster time to information and action with easy-to-use, Web-based applications
- **Powerful** — Built with the scalability, security and integration that is necessary to work in the most demanding environments
- **Flexible** — Adapting to your business processes, rather than forcing you to adapt to the software.

Once selected, the right survey software will make it easy to get started, providing survey templates, question/answer libraries, prepopulation of employee information and more. Following the survey creation, the software should allow you to schedule and automatically send out survey invitations and reminders to survey participants, maximizing responses without requiring additional time and effort.

Immediacy in distributing the survey is important. The longer the time frame in requesting feedback from a given event, the less detail a respondent can give you about the event. By using survey software that

allows for the creation of automated event triggers, a survey can be automatically sent by the organization whenever a predefined criterion is met. For example, a survey can be triggered and deployed automatically by an employee's performance review date or following an interaction with another part of the business, such as the help desk or even HR itself.

By properly selecting and implementing survey software at your company, you can ensure that the lines of communication between employees and managers are not only open, but also provide the kind of dialogue that will improve everyone's bottom line. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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