

Employee engagement surveys: How to do it and why?

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What is an employee engagement survey?

The quality of an organization's human resource is debatably the leading indicator of an organisation's growth and sustainability. This is because in the dynamic and everchanging business environment the only constant is its human resource. Employee engagement surveys measure employees' commitment, motivation, sense of purpose and passion for their work and organization. Engagement is part of the seven stages of the employee life cycle which were identified by Gallup. These include the stages an employee goes through with an organization, from attraction to going through the hiring process through employment to eventual departure. They are depicted by the image below:



Employee Engagement is defined as a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organisation that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work. Research has proven that engaged employees are more productive, more customer-focused, more satisfied, more loyal, and more committed to the success of their co-workers and the organisation.

Do employee engagement surveys work?

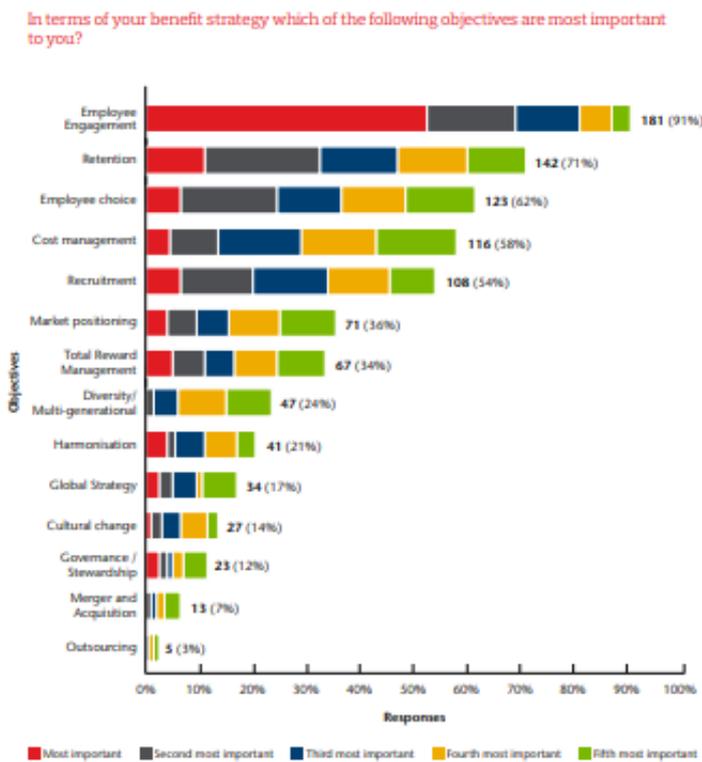
Employee engagement surveys are on the rise and for good reason. Take, for example, Gallup conducted 456 research studies across 276 organizations in 54 industries, with employees in 96 countries. Within each study, they statistically calculated the business unit level relationship between employee

engagement and performance outcomes that the organizations supplied. In total, they studied 112,312 business and work units that included 2,708,538 employees. Gallup studied 11 outcomes: customer loyalty/engagement, profitability, productivity, turnover, safety incidents, absenteeism, shrinkage, patient safety incidents, quality (defects), wellbeing and organizational citizenship. Their findings were that employee engagement has a strong relationship with all of these factors.

Companies with engaged employees were found to show better results when compared to those that do not. Gallup compared business units with high engagement levels with those that don't and came up with the following conclusions. Engaged employees:

- Increase productivity by 17%
- Increase customer ratings by 10%
- Increase sales by 20%
- Increase profitability by 21%
- Reduce absenteeism by 41%

The image below is an extract from the AON 2020 Benefits and Trends Survey. It also clearly depicts that employee engagement is the most important benefits strategy for most companies.



Here are a few statistics that show the value of employee engagement surveys:

1. In 2020, the overall percentage of engaged workers in the US is 36% ([Gallup](#))
2. Highly engaged business teams result in 21% greater profitability ([Gallup](#))
3. Actively disengaged employees cost their organizations \$483 to \$605 billion per year ([Gallup](#))

4. 43% of highly engaged employees receive feedback at least once a week ([Forbes](#))
5. 19% of employees consider themselves very engaged and plan to stay at their companies for a long time ([Achievers](#))

Why should you do employee engagement surveys?

A carefully designed and conducted employee survey can reveal a great deal of information about employee perceptions that management can use to improve the workplace. Organization responsiveness to employee feedback leads to higher retention rates, lower absenteeism, improved productivity, better customer service and higher employee morale.

Conducting a survey can also send a positive message to employees that their opinions are valued. In addition, managers can gain insights into issues affecting their departments or business units that allow them to manage more effectively.

When to carry out employee engagement surveys?

Annually is best for conducting employee engagement surveys for the following reasons:

- This normally provides adequate time since your previous survey to communicate and act on the feedback
- It allows you to benchmark progress and evaluate if your change initiatives have been effective
- Against a backdrop of a changing economy and labour market, an annual survey can help you understand and better predict your staff turnover risks
- If leaders and managers know that their team members will be invited to provide feedback in twelve months, they are more likely to take responsibility for what they can influence and make positive changes.

Managing an employee engagement survey project

Step 1: Before administering a new employee survey, HR should spend some time looking at previous surveys and their results (if any) and ask questions like:

- Why are we conducting a survey (i.e., what do we want to know, what do we hope to obtain)?
- What are we measuring, and why?
- Who will create the questions?
- Who will be asked to participate in the survey?
- When will we conduct the survey?
- Will all results be communicated, and how?
- Who will be held accountable for implementing changes driven by survey results?
- Are there questions from previous surveys that should be included again?
- Are there questions from previous surveys that need to be rewritten because they were vague or confusing?

Step 2: Keep it short and simple

The number and types of questions asked can significantly influence the survey's response rate. A general employee survey should contain up to 75 questions and take no longer than 20 to 30 minutes to complete. If the survey is too long, the response rate will likely be very low. A survey question should not be "double-barreled"—two topics that are grouped into one question, even though they may be related. If the survey items are not solidly constructed, the data generated from the survey will not be actionable.

Step 3: Ask the right questions

Survey design experts advocate the use of items that seek responses based on a numerical scale, such as 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "strongly disagree" and 5 meaning "strongly agree." Some experts recommend asking primarily closed questions—those with a finite number of answers—instead of a fill-in-the-blanks approach. This makes it easier to assess trends.

Employers should be willing to do away with, or at least limit, "nice-to-know" questions and instead focus on questions essential in understanding what employees think about their workplace.

Demographic questions that ask about gender, race and age should be voluntary to limit fears employees may have about anonymity. These questions are beneficial to include because they give employers insights into emerging group concerns and trends.

Step 4: Ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of responses

This will help ensure that all responses are as truthful as possible.

Step 5: Make use of Technology

You should make use of electronic surveys because they are more efficient and faster and use fewer resources. Make sure that employees without computers at work have a paper version of the employee survey or are given access to computers to complete the survey online.

Step 6: Data analysis

This data analysis should be scientific to ensure objectivity and accurate results. All the submitted questionnaires should be analysed to calculate both the Overall Employee Engagement Index as well as indices on your desired Employee Engagement Dimensions.

Step 7: Interpretation of Results

Survey results should not be taken at face value—even those on the positive end of the spectrum. It is crucial to also benchmark their organization's results against organizations similar to theirs or against

national employee norms.

Step 8: Develop action plans

Once the survey is complete you should develop an action plan that outlines – based on the assessment – with key initiatives management may need to take to continually improve employee engagement.

I hope this article will help you achieve high levels of employee engagement. The key to successful employee engagement is to act on the results. This will help to improve all aspects of your human capital related issues.

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