

Employee sentiment analysis: What is it and how do you go about it

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Research over the year's shows that employees feeling like they aren't being given enough opportunities for professional growth and advancement—or enough recognition is one of the greatest factors in employee disengagement.

With global employee engagement below 65%, now more than ever, it's vital that HR departments take steps to really understand what their employees are thinking, saying, and feeling. That requires data. And to gather and understand that data, many forward-thinking HR professionals are turning to employee surveys with built-in AI tools to analyse the true meaning behind their words.

Employee sentiment analysis might just be the answer to the employee engagement problem. In this article we will discuss what sentiment analysis is and the best practices to follow when carrying out one.

What is Sentiment Analysis?

Most HR professionals only collect and focus on quantitative data. They leave a number of qualitative data unorganised. Qualitative data includes the text content of continuous feedback check-ins, diary notes, comments, on boarding & off boarding feedback, probation reviews, performance reviews, policy compliance, goal chat conversations, compliance interactions, business feedback requests, records, in fact any text that is entered onto the platform by employees. Sentiment Analysis makes use of all your qualitative data, by predicting if it is negative, positive or neutral and to what degree. It involves gathering large volumes of opinions and feedback from your employees to capture, quantify, and measure their perception of your organization and how they feel about work.

Why is employee sentiment analysis important?

As employee turnover rates increase in different companies, annual performance reviews and surveys don't provide enough information for companies to get a true understanding of how employees feel about them.

Employee sentiment analysis helps to fill in that gap. It provides a number of important capabilities, including:

1. Helping companies take the necessary steps toward change when they discover that employees are dissatisfied with how the company is handling key issues such as employee performance, productivity and customer service.

1. Encouraging transparency and more open communication. When a company takes corrective actions to reassure employees that their opinions matter, it results in transparency, better communication and higher employee engagement.
1. Providing an accurate picture of employee opinions. People learn about the least desirable companies to work at from former and current employees. Employee sentiment analysis can help organizations evaluate whether these opinions are based on inaccurate perceptions. If an inaccurate opinion is harming the company's image, human resources personnel can take actions to foster more positive impressions.

Sentiment analysis technology

There are a number of employee sentiment analysis software that are powered by AI and Machine Learning. These software will enable employee sentiment data collection at scale. This technology allows them to quickly and easily send out open-ended surveys that let employees answer in their own words. From there, natural language processing (NLP) tools can rapidly review every answer, analysing the sentiment behind the words and providing a detailed report to HR and managers.

While this technology provides HR with many sophisticated solutions, it's not a complete replacement for face-to-face communication. It may still struggle to interpret things like sarcasm, jargon, and qualified statements, and complex mixed opinions (which humans often have) are hard for it to understand. But the beauty of machine learning is that the tools grow smarter the more information you feed them.

How best to conduct sentiment analysis

Here are some practical takeaways found from research for HR professionals who are using sentiment analysis technology:

1. Survey genuine issues. Employees can quickly discover that only routine topics are being surveyed. It's important that survey designers are in contact with operational teams that know what the true challenges, opportunities and hot topics are among employees.
2. Field short surveys less often. Surveys should not take more than five to seven minutes to complete. Employees can be quickly turned off by a tool that requires too much of their time. Finding the right balance between frequency and necessity is crucial for the success of any survey tool.
3. Show the connection. When employees share their feedback, HR professionals should provide results back to the employees. If you share the results and what you will do to respond to employees' concerns, you are able to drive trust and encourage future survey responses."
4. Commit to privacy. Employee privacy is critical. Ensuring privacy and anonymity of the survey tool is crucial for the success of its implementation because the right balance is the only way for employees to keep taking surveys and maintaining trust.

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