

THEME ONE:

FOCUS MORE ON ENABLING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Have traditional annual employee engagement surveys reached the end of their useful life?

A renewed focus on enabling engagement through employee empowerment is key to delivering results in a volatile and fast moving business environment.

It's time for a different approach



You feel it, right? A global paradigm shift is happening. The way we communicate and listen to each other is changing, shaped by developments in social media, use of algorithms and digitization.

For example, what type of 'listening' is reflected in today's news headlines? Brexit: a government consulting it's people through a referendum and trying to act on the results, but the outcomes satisfying no-one. Immigration: to some a threat, to others a necessity. Populism: an increasing political influence that claims to represent ordinary people. What 'conversations' are happening when this type of news just keeps coming?

The same questions can be asked of the business world. Today's change is exponential, driven by disruptive competitors, radical transparency and digitization. Organizations want fast, precise and qualitative insights. They need insights about their markets, customers, sales, and also about employees.

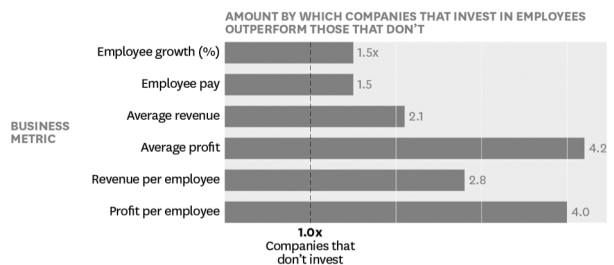
Why does all this matter in the context of employee engagement? The dual challenge is to address the organization's need for quantitative employee insights that drive performance and the need to be open to employees' voices to foster constructive conversation.

Is there also a paradigm shift when it comes to employee engagement? Do we need to find a new approach that puts listening and conversation the heart of our engagement strategies?

Regardless of the drivers for employee engagement, we know engagement has been important and valuable for decades, measured traditionally through engagement surveys.

Companies That Invest in Employee Experience Outperform Those That Don't

They're four times as profitable, according to an analysis of 250 organizations.

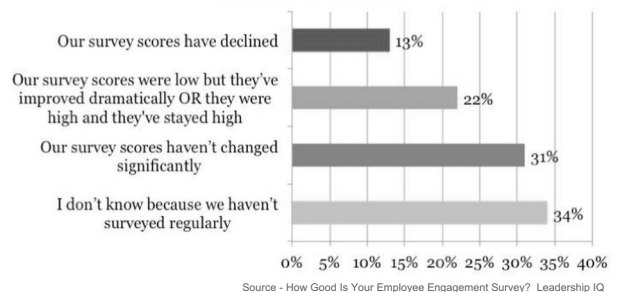


SOURCE: THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE ADVANTAGE, BY JACOB MORGAN (WILEY, 2017)

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However "Only 22% Of Companies Are Getting Good Results From Their Employee Engagement Survey"¹

Data from the quiz "How Good Is Your Employee Engagement Survey?"



Employee engagement is still an important focus. It's just where the investment and focus lies that is changing.

"Making engagement happen will be the business challenge of the next decade and a focal point of emerging talent imperative"

Source AON Hewitt, 2014.

¹ Harter, Jim, and Brandon Rignoni. *State of the American Manager: Analytics and Advice for Leaders*. Rep. Washington, DC: Gallup, 2015. Print.

Employee engagement requires a different kind of listening and conversation

The authors own experience of managing engagement surveys and initiatives left us dissatisfied with the ultimate outcomes achieved in organizations.

Our clients were telling us they needed something different for employee engagement. These needs varied from client to client – depending on whether they were large or small organizations.

However, one common theme prevailed. **Organizations want to understand and listen to their employees, and employees in turn want to be understood and heard.**

As the paradigm shift contributes to transformational changes within organizations, we were left with some questions, **“what is the value of employee opinion and insights in current times, and is still worthwhile to invest in employee engagement?”**. We embarked on this research with an open mind on the results and outcomes.

Our research showed that organizations, especially larger organizations, still undertake traditional engagement surveys, typically annually (Figure 1), focusing on quantitative results. However, many organizations realize that traditional annual employee engagement surveys have limited value.

Annual or less frequent survey cycles that were adequate for yesterday’s business environment are not meeting today’s need for immediacy, transparency and flexibility. They require tremendous resources to plan, complete, analyze and communicate, for both the survey team and participants.

Nonetheless, organizations continue to administer traditional surveys for reasons including external benchmarking, tracking long term progress, and comparing unit specific performance.

In addition to employee engagement surveys, which are typically company-wide and annually administered, organizations are experimenting with new approaches in an attempt to provide more effective and agile ways to drive engagement.

For example, our research (Figure 1) showed that some organizations are planning or implementing pulse surveys, which are potentially faster and less resource intensive than company-wide surveys.

In our view, pulse surveys are a step in the right direction if they reduce the resources required to survey employees and provide more timely results. However we note that organizations conducting pulse surveys in addition to their traditional survey cycle will experience an increase rather than decrease in effort required.

Figure 1 - Survey approaches at organizations in our research





Engagement is really about dialogue...

The most valuable insight from our research was the huge value organizations gained from the conversations and activities following the survey itself. Overwhelmingly, success stories were about productive dialogues and interactions that took place after the survey was completed. Actions and positive changes were often initiated from qualitative conversations rather than statistical survey results.

Quantitative employee engagement surveys have a role to play, but we believe the potential value of qualitative and direct dialogue with employees is much higher. We are not suggesting that measuring engagement is not important, rather we feel there is an overemphasis on this aspect of managing employee engagement. Has the time for anonymous surveys come to an end?

The strong focus on surveys should be shifted towards enabling dialogue and conversation that leads to positive change. Collecting quantitative insights can be useful but the investment in creating an empowering environment where employees can shape change will be worthwhile in terms of higher employee engagement.

To really engage employees today, a new way of thinking is required. Quantitative employee engagement surveys must be much less arduous and resource-intensive, freeing up resources to create a more targeted, flexible and direct dialogue with employees. In other words, less evaluating and more enabling.

As a result of this research, we have been able to build on our understanding of employee engagement and the factors that influence it.

At Better Business we understand that employee involvement is an elementary part of any employee engagement initiative. Therefore we support our clients in enabling employees to actively shape changes and our offers are designed to foster high quality listening and conversation. We believe in a participative approach to employee engagement that is linked to purpose and strategy. We help our clients to allocate resources appropriately to both quantitative and qualitative engagement initiatives.

The research prompted us to consider employee engagement in a new light. First, we believe that quantitative indicators, i.e. surveys, must be radically optimized for greater efficiency. In parallel, there must be a strong focus on high impact follow-up activities based around genuine listening and conversation. Finally, we propose a highly participative approach that enables employees to actively shape the process at every step.

"It's the dialogue in itself that's the most valuable part of the whole process" Interview participant

"Employees want to actively shape and discuss. They have their own ideas" Interview participant

"We don't focus on increasing 'engagement scores' we now focus on using timely insights from our people to empower them to deliver our strategy" Interview participant



RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ **Meaningful insights . . .** Consider a new type of dialogue solution which enables each individual to say what is important to their engagement at that time.
- ✓ **If quantitative insights are important. . .** Be very clear on your survey's objectives and define a minimum number of insight questions and respondents necessary to meet requirements.
- ✓ **Timing . . .** If you undertake a regular survey cycle reconsider with a view towards radical minimization and optimization.
- ✓ **Sample size . . .** Consider random sampling rather than company-wide participation. Utilize pulse surveys to target specific questions and populations.
- ✓ **Investment emphasis . . .** Invest in dialogues with employees and provide them with support and tools to design and implement change.

We're here to help



- ☐ Better Business can undertake an assessment of existing engagement practices against organizational context and best practices with recommendations for improvement
- ☐ We provide workshops and tools for teams and leaders to design ways of working that will increase employee engagement and readiness to address their specific business challenges.
- ☐ Better Business offers support for generating questions and dialogue formats that will lead to employee engagement insights and generate constructive conversations.
- ☐ If your organization wants quantitative and qualitative data Better Business offers a next generation engagement tool. This is achieved by linking engagement measures to individual needs and your specific business strategy, providing specific and actionable insight into how to improve business performance.

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Get in touch with Better Business for a conversation that could change your perspective.



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