



How to avoid ineffective employee surveys and create real change

In this paper we are going to look at the root causes of this multifaceted problem through the lens of the main vehicle for employee engagement; the employee survey, and provide some recommendations for how you can get the best out of your survey.

By Lanning Bennett, Managing Director of The Coi Group

“Nothing ever really changes in our people related initiatives. Sure, we plan well and with good intentions; we roll out a time consuming and expensive employee opinion survey to capture employee issues; we report back and make recommendations but somehow that never seems to translate into action or anything really changing”.

This recent conversation I had with an HR Director of a large Australian company, whilst being unusually brutal in its honesty, is typical of discussions I have over and over again with those charged with improving organisational effectiveness.

But wait, it gets worse! This problem has tentacles that spread throughout the organisation.

Senior executives complain to me that the money they are investing in improving organisational effectiveness is not reaping a return on investment.

Departmental managers, already dealing with a full plate of responsibilities, complain that they don't have the training, tools and clear process to follow that allow them to roll out change programs to their teams that are going to work.

Beleaguered HR teams seethe with frustration at all the work and effort that goes into programs, such as the annual employee survey, that fail to get traction.

Finally, the subject of all this combined investment of energy and money, the employees, shrug their collective shoulders and say “Why bother? Nothing ever really changes.”

Is any of this starting to sound familiar? Perhaps this may seem an overly bleak picture to you. Yet 80% of organisations we speak to express significant disappointment with their current employee survey process.

In this paper we are going to look at the root causes of this multifaceted problem through the lens of the main vehicle for employee engagement; the employee survey, and provide some recommendations for how you can get the best out of your survey.



Problems with the pre-survey phase

Firstly, problems with the pre survey phase.

- Often the survey questions are too generic and not specific enough to be relevant at the team level, often they are questions that matter to the senior executives not the employees. Questions don't reflect local team specific issues.
- Demographic questions are not asked at a granular enough level and therefore subsequent report sets are too generic and do not reflect specific team issues.
- Expectations of the survey and the subsequent process are not clearly communicated through all levels of the organisation.

The main issue is a lack of interest in a strong, post survey, business process. In many organisations once the initial survey has been done interest in the survey dwindles fast.

Problems with the post-survey phase

However the key area for improvement lies in the post survey phase. So what are some of the problems in this phase of the project? The main issue is a lack of interest in a strong, post survey, business process. In fact in many organisations once the initial survey has been done interest in the survey dwindles fast. There is little focus on turning data and reports into real action and results.

The post survey process frequently lacks punch.

- It is top down and not bottom up, it fails to reflect day to day details and thus fails to engage all employees.
- It relies heavily on HR to resource the process which, particularly for large organisations, is rarely possible.
- It is inconsistent with some team leaders following through and others not. This creates misalignment and reduces impact.
- External consultants are often employed to solve the resource issue and add expertise. However this is expensive and does not build internal capability amongst the leadership.

Recommendations for improving the post survey phase

So what does an effective post survey process look like?

- Speedy. It is important to move fast, don't let time lapse between the survey and action planning, keep up the momentum.
- Distribution. Ensure that meaningful team specific data is distributed to the team leaders.
- Provide the team leaders with clear instructions, a clear process to follow with specific timeframes and most importantly, an effective action planning tool utilising a common framework.

If you would like to talk to us about the issues you may have in your organisation please contact the author, Lanning Bennett on 1300 364 705 or lbennett@coigroup.com for a confidential discussion.

- Get the most senior executive possible to chair the governance meetings. This adds weight and decision making authority to the process. It tells everyone you are taking this seriously.
- Capture actions and priorities from the bottom up before looking to aggregate findings into organisation wide policies and plans.
- Quickly communicate success stories back to the troops.
- Ensure there is a feedback loop so that you can check that the agreed actions are well received by the employees. Be prepared to change your action plan if feedback is poor.
- Encourage and reward success, link a fully formed action plan to the performance management system of the team leaders.
- Ensure you carry out regular targeted progress checks throughout the year. You should not wait a whole year until the next survey to test response to your initiatives.
- Use software to help keep the post survey improvement process on track, cost effectively and easily.

Benefits of getting it right

The benefits to your organisation of getting this process right are enormous. Given the overall weakness in effective utilisation of employee opinion surveys, a well run, effective survey will provide your organisation with a genuine competitive advantage.

You can expect to:

- Significantly reduce staff attrition
- Attract and retain the best talent
- Improve leadership skills at all levels
- Improve employee commitment and engagement
- Reinforce and strengthen organisational alignment and focus
- Boost sales and deepen customer relationships

The Coi Group specialise in employee opinion surveys that create genuine action and change. We have invested heavily in the post survey phase of the process and deliver world class, best of breed survey action planning software (SAPS). SAPS is a key part of our full employee opinion survey solution, OEP, but is also available as an add-on to your existing survey tool.

If you would like to talk to us about the issues you may have in your organisation please contact the author, Lanning Bennett on 1300 364 705 or email lbennett@coigroup.com for a confidential discussion.