

Employee Engagement Measurement Best Practices

What is Employee Engagement?

Employee engagement is often associated with employees being “happy” or “satisfied” with their jobs. While it is true that engaged employees tend to be happier in their employment, this is an incomplete definition. True employee engagement means that the employee is emotionally committed to the organization and its goals.

Engaged employees “feel” the importance of the organization’s goals and are dialed-in; willing to invest discretionary effort to assist the organization in reaching its objectives. These employees work beyond what they “have” to do and are willing to work harder/better/smarter because they want to help the organization be successful.

Why Measure Employee Engagement?

Employee engagement correlates highly with stronger growth, improved profitability, and increased employee retention. Many employee engagement efforts attempt to measure and improve themes such as communication, development opportunities, recognition, and trust. An employee’s experience related to these topics affects their level of engagement and their overall commitment to the organization’s goals. Considering that on average, only 34% of employees are engaged at work (Harter, 2022), measuring, and improving engagement is more critical than ever.

How is Engagement Measured?

Employee engagement can be measured by examining metrics such as turnover rates, productivity, customer, or patient feedback.

It is measured in many organizations through an engagement survey. Such surveys may be administered via software, paper surveys, or conversational “listening” programs. All methods are intended to collect employee feedback.

Many people associate the term “employee engagement” with an annual survey; while this is a common approach, it is not the only approach. Finding the best engagement approach that aligns with the mission and goals of your organization takes work but will ultimately be a valuable investment.

Types of Engagement Measures

Below are various types of engagement measurement tools. An organization's approach to measuring engagement can be multi-faceted, with numerous data sources available. Most of these options can be delivered via online or paper survey or incorporated into conversational approaches. A few common tools include:

- Employee engagement survey: A 40-60 item survey that measures many aspects of engagement including:
 - Alignment between an individual and their job, manager, team, and culture
 - Satisfaction with compensation and benefits, career development opportunities, and recognition
 - Perception of organizational fairness
 - Belief in senior leadership

Such surveys may be administered via a paper or online survey tool to improve anonymity. Surveys may occur every year, every other year, or even twice per year.

- Company culture survey: A more targeted approach focused only on company culture, mission, vision, values, work environment, and often, belief in senior leadership.
- Employee satisfaction survey: A targeted approach focused on work hygiene factors, such as facilities, work environment, pay, benefits, or similar factors.
- Pulse checks: Short surveys or polling questions, often 1-5 questions maximum, to capture specific feedback from employees on a topic. Pulse checks are often incorporated into check-ins, employee all-hands meetings, or even an organization's intranet. Pulse checks can be used to supplement larger survey efforts or to capture timely feedback on relevant issues.
- Exit interviews: These can be used to gather feedback from departing employees who are thought to have less risk bringing up "difficult to hear" feedback about a variety of topics. A manager or department with high turnover might implement exit interviews to evaluate potential reasons driving the high turnover rate.
- Stay interviews: Stay interviews attempt to collect feedback from employees about what they like about their roles, as well as what could be improved. A stay interview is meant to provide a more proactive approach than an exit interview, capturing feedback from employees about what would make them leave, so that the issues can be corrected *before* the employee would consider resigning.
- New hire onboarding surveys: Ensure that new hires understand the expectations for their new position and believe that they have the tools and resources necessary to perform the job successfully and collect feedback about the onboarding process.

Developing an Employee Engagement Approach

The primary stages of administering a study include planning, delivery, analyzing data, and action. The organization must consider vital elements such as choosing a topic(s), timing, frequency, format, etc. Tools like the [Employee Engagement Timeline](#) are useful for providing insight into key planning elements.

Best Practices When Measuring Engagement

- **Survey / Data Collection Format**
 - Select an engagement tool, survey, or approach that works best for your organization and what you are trying to learn about your employees.
 - The most effective approach includes less than 50 total questions.
- **Trust is Essential**
 - Employees must know that they are being provided a safe forum to provide feedback.
 - Survey methods still have challenges. Employees may be suspicious that their feedback or comments will be linked back to them directly (by capturing names, email addresses, or other unique identifiers) or indirectly (a manager with two direct reports receives survey results can easily guess “who said what”).
 - When asking for employee feedback, the only mindset among management should be “thank you for sharing this valuable feedback” without any attempts to retaliate against employees who share their honest input.
- **Frequency**
 - If managers are being asked to talk to employees about engagement, how often will they do so? How long will it take?
 - If a larger survey effort is being conducted, how often will it launch?
 - If using a shorter pulse-check method, how often will it be deployed?
- **Survey Topics**
 - Only measure topics that you can act upon. For example, do not ask employees to provide feedback about their compensation if the organization’s financial situation does not allow for this to be improved.
 - Choose one or two areas of focus that the organization wants to improve or that require action. If turnover is high, consider focusing on job fit, manager trust, and feedback, for example.
 - Choose the demographics you want to track to ensure detailed results for analysis. For example, you might need to know if employees in various locations feel differently about the organization.
- **Survey Communication**
 - Establish a cadence for engagement project communication and keep employees informed at every stage of the process (i.e., three times before project/survey

- launch, three times during the data collection period, and three-times post project to share results and feedback).
- All communications should be confidential (do not share participant names or emails address in communications). Survey efforts should limit reporting only to managers who have 5 or more direct reports, to protect confidentiality.
 - Frame communication with employees in mind, make formal communications concise, and hold managers accountable for encouraging participation.
 - Partner with key stakeholders such as human resources or senior leadership or with individuals with expertise in administering surveys who can provide expertise regarding your efforts.

Best Practices When Analyzing Engagement Results

- **Thank Employees**
 - Thank all employees for participating and taking the time to provide valuable feedback.
- **Review and Analyze Results**
 - Look at the results for each question asked, as well as average responses across groups of items about the same topic. For example, if you asked 5 questions about the employee's relationship with his/her manager, analyze each question individually, but also look at an average across all 5 manager questions.
 - Consider the engagement drivers that are unique to your organization and select one to two results to focus your action plans.
 - Compare results to your last survey or engagement project, if applicable.
 - Aggregate the data to identify unique employee perceptions across teams, departments, locations, functions, gender, tenure, etc., so you can better target your efforts.
 - Implement action plans. Evaluate and adjust as applicable.
- **Communicate Results**
 - Debrief executive leadership teams or individual managers regarding your findings, as needed.
 - Share a summary of key findings with employees (keep in mind the need to protect confidentiality).
 - Communicate a timeline and clarify accountability for action plans. Provide periodic updates.
 - Conduct follow-up meetings with managers and teams to keep improvement efforts on-track