

4 WAYS EMPLOYEE SURVEYS LEVERAGE ASSETS AND IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

Employee surveys are an ideal value-adding solution, especially when used in customized ways that enhance teamwork and communication, accelerate production, and develop a pipeline of employee talent and high potential for a sustainable future.

In today's rapidly evolving competitive marketplace and challenging economy, employee surveys offer an affordable, adaptable, and conveniently scalable tool. When leveraged properly a survey of employees can become an indispensable asset, and surveys can be remarkably useful in addressing a wide range of issues confronting today's businesses.

Here are four unique and innovative ways, for example, that surveys are now being used to solve some of the biggest managerial and human resource challenges companies now face.

1 Surveys to Combat the Costly Silo Syndrome

In a recent study conducted by Industry Week, researchers found that the "silo effect" was one of the most serious challenges to corporate growth. More than 96 percent of the business leaders surveyed by the American Management Association, for example, cited this insidious phenomenon as a problem within their organizations.

Silo effect is an industrial psychology term used to describe the hoarding of data or other valuable information within companies. The concept is derived from the use of silos in agriculture, where grains are stored in a vertically constructed warehouse. Within today's corporations much valuable knowledge and information is similarly kept hidden away in file cabinets, computer files, and small departments or teams. Rather than effectively and efficiently sharing this data across teams and departments it tends to remain in one place or under one individual's control.

- A contractor may, for instance, give a set of measurements of an office to the maintenance department. Those measurements wind up in the desk of one of the maintenance men, and not even the department manager knows about them.
- Meanwhile the VP of marketing, who needs those same measurements in order to convince a client to lease office space, doesn't know that the maintenance department has them. So she pays another vendor to take new measurements, wasting corporate revenues due to a lack of information sharing.
- Six months later an interior designer bills the company for yet another set of measurements because nobody she interacts with realizes that there are already two sets of perfectly good measurements inside the company.

The silo effect paralyzes access to valuable resources because of psychological, managerial, or systematic barriers to communication and lateral sharing. Walls are erected around individuals or departments, and until these are taken down the silo effect continues to be an obstacle to data circulation and optimum performance.

The silo mentality likewise impedes cross-pollination of ideas and often contributes to lower workplace morale. The person who spends an entire week searching for a needle in a haystack, for instance, only to find out later that it was in a colleague's computer files may become entirely frustrated and resentful. They will react by hoarding information for themselves in order to increase their value to the company, hampering cooperation and fostering a counterproductive corporate atmosphere.

But the good news is that the entire problem of the silo mentality can be preempted by using targeted employee surveys on a regular basis. By soliciting input from individuals and departments regarding their access to information – or their inability to get the data they need when they want it – managers and leaders can identify and quickly isolate silos within companies. Then they can take proactive steps to eliminate them for the mutual benefit of everyone. A timely follow-up survey can reveal how well the remedy is working, and it also sends a strong message to employees that their concerns are being listened to and addressed at the highest levels.

Keep in mind that employee buy-in is always a key to success when conducting any survey. But when employees see that surveys result in practical actions that help them in their day-to-day jobs they begin to embrace the idea. They are more encouraged to participate in future surveys, and they feel more invested in their organization because they know that their voices are being heard.

Thanks to a strategic use of employee surveys the longstanding silos fall away, cross-communication increases, workplace morale improves, and productivity accelerates. Time and money are saved instead of being squandered by the detrimental silo mentality, and the savings is more than enough to easily pay for the cost of surveys.

2 Improved Process Mapping Procedures Thanks to Survey Data

A lack of clear step-by-step procedures for performing routine tasks is another problem plaguing many organizations. They struggle with ways to improve clarity and enhance the efficiency of their process mapping designs, but sometimes one of the easiest and most affordable approaches is through an employee survey system.

People and their work habits are the primary elements and building blocks of the process map, and employee surveys offer an excellent way to gain a better understanding of what those people are doing and why. The information gained through an employee survey can reveal exactly what impediments people encounter, what links in the chain of process are weakest or strongest, and what ideas they have to contribute in terms of process mapping best practices.

- Sometimes a survey will uncover something as simple to fix as a lack of proper training and instruction about how basic procedures are to be done. With one workshop the whole system can be improved.

- Or an employee may observe a breakdown in communication or a confusing overlap of responsibility. Those expected to perform a task are convinced that it is someone else's job so nobody does it.
- Maybe those who are trying to do their job need approval from managers in a different department. That may cause unnecessary delays as they attempt to communicate across a large organization or between departments who do not share the same budget or teamwork objectives.

Research shows that approximately 80 percent of all product defects and problems with customer service can be attributed to poor process mapping systems. But by involving employees who on the front lines and in the trenches through an employee survey it is possible to improve process maps, eliminate redundant work, and give employees an enhanced sense of ownership in the organization.

Managers and leaders can be supplied with detailed and customized survey reports that are appropriate to their particular positions of responsibility, and the results of surveys can be shared with employees to make them feel like part of the management team.

To ensure the most active and candid input from employees, this type of survey should usually be conducted in a way that ensures airtight confidentiality and absolute anonymity. Employees who know that their identities will not be disclosed and that whatever complaints they may make cannot be traced back to them are much more inclined to step forward with helpful insights. Anonymity also protects managers, because they can give a valuable snapshot of what is going on in their particular department without feeling that their comments will result in a poor performance evaluation.

Nobody feels threatened or critiqued because of a situation that may be beyond their own control. In that way an employee survey is often a much superior tool for dealing with process mapping issues – especially when compared to approaches involving potentially confrontational face-to-face interviews, departmental audits, or vague mandates from team coordinators or senior managers. The bottom line result of using employee surveys in this way is that everyone gains from efficiency and improved process mapping systems – and the cure is highly cost effective because employee surveys are so affordable.

3 Employee Surveys and Development of High Potentials

Companies are constantly fighting attrition and competing to retain qualified workers, and the added financial burden of recruiting and training new replacement employees is extraordinary – especially during a tough economy.

Research shows that typical employee turnover costs a company an average of 150 percent of that employee's base salary. That means that offering employees an opportunity for skill enhancement or added responsibility and advancement is often the smartest investment because it generates extraordinary potential returns. Savings are especially apparent when calculated against the risk and bottom line expense of losing an employee to a competitor. Factor in the loss of managerial or sales personnel, though, where pay grades are higher and turnovers can cost as much as 250 percent of baseline salaries, and the financial damage can actually cripple a company.

One of the great challenges for companies is to find out which employees are dissatisfied and what kinds of support or opportunity they want. If they can identify those needs and fulfill them, businesses can retain their talent while also developing future leaders to fuel the succession planning pipeline. Otherwise they risk losing their best and most valuable people to competitors.

Potential hires observe the high volume of turnover and decide to apply elsewhere, because the organization develops a stigma as being a place of employment that is not worker-friendly and cannot ensure sustained growth and career success. Meanwhile if employees are shopping around for greener pastures they are not going to reveal that confidential information to employers. But employees will almost always share that kind of secret as long as their anonymity and confidentiality can be absolutely guaranteed – as it is with a professionally administered survey. If they are given a forum and a voice through an employee survey then they will be completely forthcoming about what they expect and need. Armed with that kind of insight HR departments and executives can respond with specific proactive initiatives to support and further develop their existing employees, attract the best talent in the industry, and generate goodwill and a reputation as a great company within which to build a career.

These days a healthy and sustainable life/work balance is also extremely high on the priority list of most professionals. Here again, employee surveys can give employees deep insight into how these issues are impacting the lives of their employees. They can react before employees experience a drop in performance or a devastating burnout, and by doing so they ensure a happy, personally invested, sustainable workforce.

4 Surveys as Tools for Value-Adding Recognition of Employees

The employee survey typically adds value in another way that often surprises companies when they realize the unexpected survey bonus. Just by conducting a professionally designed and managed survey and responding to its results, companies generate tremendous benefit because they are perceived as acknowledging and recognizing the contributions of employees. This factor cannot be underestimated because it often delivers invaluable benefit.

A large university recently solicited input from students and faculty, for instance, by sending out a user-friendly online survey. But what the school did not anticipate was the overwhelmingly positive reaction to the survey. Students and professors praised university administrators for reaching out to them, taking their feedback under consideration, and giving them a platform for speaking up and sharing their ideas. As a result of just one successful survey the school reported substantially improved departmental morale and communication, and students and faculty members took it upon themselves to become vocal ambassadors of the university, recommending it to friends and colleagues.

Employee surveys will often result in this kind of value-adding outcome, in other words, because a survey represents a level of recognition that is often not accomplished by other means. Even giving employees a raise or bonus will sometimes have less impact than giving them praise. When employee surveys are designed well to encourage high percentage participation they automatically provide the powerful fringe benefit of tangible recognition and a palpable sense of employee empowerment and inclusion.

As illustrated by the preceding examples and survey applications, carefully designed and strategically implemented employee surveys can ensure high performance results and greater utilization of resources at an attractive price point. Today's survey tools make multi-dimensional contributions to organizations of all sizes, across diverse industries and professions. Survey technology and science is now so sophisticated that employee surveys provide solutions across an entire spectrum of practical applications.

Knowledge is power – especially in today’s information age – and tapping into knowledgeable and informative resources through affordable and effective surveys is an outstanding way to build and nurture organizational excellence and performance. The results have the potential to directly contribute to the bottom line in ways that are measurable and quantifiable – and that translates into greater success and competitive sustainability with a stronger company brand, image, and internal culture.

About WorldAPP

Collecting, integrating and displaying data to improve business process is WorldAPP’s core competency. We call such solutions Integrated Data Engineering Applications or IDEAs. These are user-friendly tools designed to solve any complex data related process. So what data management problems do you need help with? Chances are, a WorldAPP IDEA can solve it.

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