THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEYS:

BRIDGING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

WHITEPAPER

ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to provide a practical overview of the present and future of employee engagement surveys as effective tools for inclusion in employee research strategies and plans, particularly as HR Technology advances and innovates. Accessing this resource allows for focusing of HR initiatives and action plans that positively contribute to bottom line and business unit profitability, through the increase in employee engagement levels and quality two way communication between employer-employee. We accomplish this objective by focusing on best practices and advancements in measurement, data collection, reporting and analytics that maximize the strategic impact of employee research. In addition, we highlight trends that appear to be shaping employee research innovations and new practices in the years to come.

ENGAGEMENT IS A CRITICAL MEASUREMENT FOR COMPANIES TODAY

As the impacts of the global and local economies continue to grow - shining a spotlight on effective leadership - employee engagement and retention have increasingly become a top priority.

As attention shifts towards the health and happiness of staff, global employee engagement remains surprisingly low. In recent times, we have been inundated with results from studies that show only about 1/3 of employees are actively engaged, and Glassdoor data shows an average engagement of C+ (3.1 out of 5).[1] And research shows that companies with high levels of disengagement have a 32.7% decline in operating income. Disengaged employees cost the global economy billions every year! While these statistics (and many more like them) continue to be front and centre, more and more chief executives are recognizing the impact employee engagement has on the bottom line. CEOs are actively seeking out ways to make their company a "great place to work". Free food, unlimited vacation, yoga classes, and lavish educational benefits are becoming more common. However, although 90% of leaders say that engagement impacts on business, 75% also report that they don't have an engagement strategy.

> **2 reasons we need to be concerned about employee engagement:**
>
> 1.   research indicates a surprisingly small percentage of employees are actively engaged in their jobs; and
>
> 2.   employees' level of engagement affects the bottom line.

Why Employee Engagement is Important for HR and Organizational Leaders									
Employee Engagement	>	Employee Productivity	>	Service & Retention	>	Customer Satisfaction	>	Customer Loyalty	>	Business Growth & Profit

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[1] "Feedback is the Killer App: A New Market and Management Model Emerges", Forbes, Bersin, Josh, August 26, 2015 Accessed: April 2016
http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2015/08/26/employee-feedback-is-the-killer-app-a-new-market-emerges/print/

A common question that is asked is why is there such a wide variation in employee engagement and retention?
Because building a highly engaged workforce is difficult and requires proactive care and attention.

If we look at employee ratings of employers as a whole, we find that performance follows a bell curve performance, with the majority of the companies ranking in the middle range. What we also see is the highly engaged organizations on the right hand side of the bell curve come in all shapes and sizes: all industries, all sizes and all ages. However, when we look at their engagement tactics, they do have some things in common.

In a study conducted by Deloitte University, there are 20 distinct factors that contribute to employee engagement, which helps illustrate all of the items that are in play when considering what to include in an employee engagement strategy:

Meaningful work	Hands-on management	Positive work environment	Growth opportunity	Trust in leadership
Autonomy	Clear, transparent goals	Flexible work environment	Training and support on the job	Mission and purpose
Select to fit	Coaching	Humanistic workplace	Facilitated talent mobility	Continuous investment in people
Small, empowered teams	Invest in management development	Culture of recognition	Self-directed, dynamic learning	Transparency and honesty
Time for slack	Modern performance management	Inclusive, diverse work environment	High-impact learning culture	Inspiration
A focus on simplicity				

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The 10 C's of Employee Engagement

C

Connect
Career
Clarity
Convey
Congratulate
Contribute
Control
Collaborate
Credibility
Confidence

The case for immediate attention: Just as there are many factors that go into the development of an employee engagement strategy, there are a variety of ways disengagement threatens your business:

1.   ***Disengaged employees fire customers*** - today's customers do business with companies based on the level of service they receive. It is the employees who ultimately create the delightful - or not so delightful - experience for the customers, influencing the customers' emotional connection with the company;

2.   ***Disengaged employees are under-productive*** - disengaged employees make 100 times more errors than their engaged colleagues[2]. That's 100 times more resources of time, energy and money that are wasted because of errors tied to engagement. Presenteeism, which is defined as the time employees spend at work while not productively engaged in work, is

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[2] "Towers Watson, 2012 Global Workforce Study, Engagement at Risk: Driving Strong Performance in a Volatile Global Environment" Accessed: April 2016 https://www.towerswatson.com/en/Insights/IC-Types/Survey-Research-Results/2012/07/2012-Towers-Watson-Global-Workforce-Study

another issue worthy of attention. Researchers estimate that the true cost of presenteeism to an organization is larger than that of absenteeism[3]. Unhappy employees who stay can be a bigger problem than those who leave - they have an oversized negative impact on everyone else[4];

3.   ***Disengaged employees call in "sick"*** - disengaged employees look for an escape route from the place they hate most - their workplace. Even worse, engaged employees (the ones showing up to work and putting in extra discretionary effort) have to pick up the slack, negatively impacting their own performance. According to Mercer, the total cost of absenteeism can be as much as 36% of payroll when combined with the cost of absence-related health care coverage. (of that figure, 9% is unplanned absences.)[5] A decrease of only 10% in employee absence could produce a 1 - 2% savings in payroll costs;

4.   ***Disengaged employees will leave the company*** - Research shows that employees will look elsewhere for work when they feel under appreciated and undervalued.[6] When employees leave they take with them the knowledge, skills and experience that contributed to success so far. Expect to pay at least 1/5th of an employee's salary to replace that employee. (Includes the following: separation costs, increased overtime and other costs incurred when existing employees pick up the slack), replacement costs associated with recruitment; and on-boarding/ training costs.

> *Here's the cost breakdown: let's say your organization has 1,500 employees and you experience 10% turnover. If your average base salary per employee is $50,000, you can expect to lose at least $1.5million per year in turnover costs.*
>
> *1,500 employees x 10% turnover x $50,000 average base salary*
> *=*
> *$1.5 million loss per year in turnover costs*

5.   ***Disengaged employees negatively impact profitability*** - companies with a highly engaged workforce experience a 19 percent growth in operating income over a 12-month period.[7] Additionally, companies with engaged employees drive profits as much as 3 x faster than their competitors. Yet, a disengaged employee costs an organization approximately $3,400 for every $10,000 in annual salary. Engaged employees were 5 times less likely than non-engaged employees to have a safety incident and 7 times less likely to have a lost-time safety incident.

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3 "The True Picture of Workplace Absenteeism", A Morneau Shepell research report, 2013 Accessed: April 2016
http://www.morneaushepell.com/permafiles/62090/true-picture-workplace-absenteeism.pdf

4 "How a Few Bad Apples Ruin Everything", The Wall Street Journal, Sutton, Robert, October 24, 2011 Accessed: April 2016
http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203499704576622550325233260

5 "Taking Control of Employee Absenteeism and the Associated Costs", Mercer,Klachefsky, October 9, 2008 Accessed: April 2016
https://www.shrm.org/multimedia/webcasts/Documents/1008absenteeism.pdf

6 "There Are Significant Business Costs to Replacing Employees", Center for American Progress, Bushy, Heather and Glynn, Sarah Jane, November 16, 2012 Accessed: April 2016
https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/labor/report/2012/11/16/44464/there-are-significant-business-costs-to-replacing-employees/

7 "Show Me the Money: The Bottom Line Impact of Employee Engagement", Talent Management and HR (TLNT HR), Haydon, Reese, June 11, 2013 Accessed: April 2016
http://www.eremedia.com/tlnt/show-me-the-money-the-bottom-line-impact-of-employee-engagement/

In order to add value to the Employee Experience, HR has to take this on and build systems and frameworks to harness all this feedback and data so executives and leaders can make informed decisions on a regular basis.

Keeping top of mind all of the above mentioned ways that engagement financially impacts your business, it becomes abundantly clear why designing and implementing an engagement strategy is a critical need. However, working with engagement strategies has evolved (out of necessity and increasing opportunities afforded by areas such as technology) from *descriptive* (identify and describe problem areas for organizations and leadership) to *prescriptive* (how to use information about employees' level of engagement as a business indicator that drives deliverable actions of a positive nature, which are now of a primary concern). Engage employees, align them to business objectives and company values, and recognize their achievements in the moment. **With this approach costly disengagement can be overcome, top talent is retained, and will drive business success.**

FEEDBACK AND ANALYSIS

So how do we figure out the engagement levels of employees? We seek out ways to solicit and gather their feedback.

Feedback provides a wealth of information that can be used constructively to unleash innovation, solve problems, and create empowerment in the organization.

Just as customer feedback has transformed the customer experience, employee feedback is transforming the employee experience.

As an example, the concept of the "always on engagement survey" started as a small idea and has now become mainstream. Companies in all industries realize that they must compete and operate based on a culture mandate. If you don't know what your culture is and you're not watching it on a daily basis, you can't possibly curate and improve it. So the world of pulse surveys, always-on-feedback tools, anonymous suggestion systems and corporate "Like Buttons" is upon us.

And feedback reaches far beyond employee happiness. Once a feedback app is implemented, complete with a thorough incorporation of analysis into the processes, help will also appear with business performance, turnover issues, theft and abuse, compliance violations, customer service issues, and a whole variety of other operational issues.[8] All HR business units should be building in an analytics team

The way we manage, lead and organize ourselves is undergoing a radical change.

Feedback is not just a fad, it's a major trend.

- the ability to harness and understand the data about your people is becoming core to the HR

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[8] "Feedback is the Killer App: A New Market and Management Model Emerges", Forbes, Bersin, Josh, August 26, 2015 Accessed: April 2016 http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2015/08/26/employee-feedback-is-the-killer-app-a-new-market-emerges/print/

mission for 2016 and beyond. One of the hottest new areas of HR (and business) is People Analytics: mining employee data to understand ways to improve business performance.[9]

TECHNOLOGY

We have entered into a new age in the digital world of work. All aspects of our work and the way we manage it are being dramatically transformed. Digital technologies have radically changed our lives, our societies and our experiences at work. These changes, which impact organizations in every country, are coupled with a new workforce which is increasingly diverse (in gender, age, culture and nationality), demanding and mobile.

Adding to these changes are a tremendous number of innovative new technologies, tools and systems for HR. All this technology will change the way we manage people, forcing HR to stay vigilant of new ways to get work done.[10]

> This new digital life (and workplace) is forcing us to rethink HR from top to bottom; how we design programs, the tools we use, and how we roll out and communicate solutions.

Technology change is everywhere. We spend hours a day interacting with digital apps (checking our phones upward of 8 billion times a day), we are monitored closely by digital devices and we are influenced by suggestions, nudges and recommendations driven by analytics and behavioural economics.

> Single leading predictor of business unit profitability is "employee engagement"

Source: "Feedback is the Killer App: A New Market and Management Model Emerges", Forbes, Bersin, Josh, August 26, 2015 Accessed: April 2016 http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2015/08/26/employee-feedback-is-the-killer-app-a-new-market-emerges/print/

TECHNOLOGY + FEEDBACK + ANALYTICS + ACTION = ENGAGEMENT

The majority of organizations are currently measuring their employee engagement through annual surveys. The flaw in measuring employee engagement once a year and then forgetting about it for another 12 months have become abundantly clear. An annual survey only delivers a snapshot of the employee's performance and satisfaction levels in the workplace. It also doesn't push an organization to followup and make sure that improvements and targets suggested in the yearly meeting are actually being carried out. There is nothing more tedious than an engagement meeting that is just a repeat of the conversation you had the year before. Or an engagement survey which ultimately has the subject ticking the same boxes and writing the same comments that they did 12 months previously which ultimately disengages rather than engages.

Gathering an accurate understanding of how employees feel about each other, their leaders, their current positions and the organization as a whole is the starting point for determining what aspects of the organization are currently working effectively and which elements present the

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[9] "Feedback is the Killer App: A New Market and Management Model Emerges", Forbes, Bersin, Josh, August 26, 2015 Accessed: April 2016 http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2015/08/26/employee-feedback-is-the-killer-app-a-new-market-emerges/print/

[10] "The New Digital World of Work: How HR will Change in 2016", FORBES Business Journal, Bersin, Josh, January 29, 2016 Accessed: April 2016 http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2016/01/29/ten-predictions-for-hr-leaders-in-2016-how-the-digital-world-of-work-will-change/#4ded16fb4d11

most opportunities for improvement. But have you ever felt that you've written a survey and by the time you've gotten results back, the whole landscape has changed? Organizations are dynamic and they are currently operating in environments that are shifting and changing frequently and rapidly in response to internal and external forces. An annual survey ends up having to be updated by in person meetings which are labour and expense intensive and slow down the process even more.

So, what are some of the best ways to measure engagement continuously? Carrying out shorter variations of the annual engagement survey numerous times throughout the year/month/ week is a popular option. Some companies ask their employees to complete short weekly or even daily rapid pulse surveys, such as those offered via PulseTip Analytics. The methods for tracking the general engagement "mood" of a company in real-time continue to develop.

Analytics have the potential to resolve the problem of the gap between how engaged employees think they are and the extent to which they actually are. In the era of big data, collecting from pulse surveys allows for granting new insight into engagement levels and can be measured continuously over time. Examples of things that can be measured include: willingness of an employee to carry out discretionary extra work outside of office hours to get larger tasks done; their thoughts on attendance at informal, optional meetings; and their connections/collaborations with colleagues outside of their immediate team.

The future of measuring engagement will be a combination of frequent surveys and big data. It will also become ever more sophisticated as time goes on.

A pulse survey is an assessment designed to quickly elicit feedback from employees to address work-related topics and employee needs. Pulse surveys are delivered through a variety of methods and range from in-house surveys to assessments administered using a survey platform or by research and consulting companies. This approach can quickly target subsets of an employee population, whether it's a project team, a sample of the employee population or a specific audience affected by a particular company change as well as be tuned in to topical issues relevant for different enduser groups.

Value of Pulse Surveys

When used strategically and potentially as complementary tools for larger initiatives, pulse surveys provide valuable data to companies that want the ability to respond quickly to change or increase employee feedback as company initiatives evolve. **Many leaders know the value of regularly tracking financial metrics. Pulse surveys also allow them to monitor crucial people metrics.**

4 ways companies can use pulse surveys[11]:
1.   ***Recalibrate*** - by receiving insights into what employees are thinking about workplace changes, leaders and managers can use data from pulse surveys to recalibrate actions, resources and priorities to achieve peak performance e.g. reactions to a new rule or policy, a new leader or an organizational restructuring;

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[11] "Amid Rapid-Fire Workplace Change, Pulse Surveys Emerge", Mann, Annamarie and Harter, Jim Harter, Gallup, March 10, 2016 Accessed: April 2016
http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/189875/amid-rapid-fire-workplace-change-pulse-surveys-emerge.aspx?
utm_source=alert&utm_medium=email&utm_content=morelink&utm_campaign=syndication

2.	***Diagnose*** - pulse surveys can give managers and leaders insight into the effectiveness of strategic initiatives and focus attention on areas of the company that may require more training or support;

3.	***Monitor*** - pulse surveys can be an efficient way to monitor a company's mood, employees' workplace experiences or progress toward achieving key performance indicators. They can also be used to monitor the drivers of employee engagement;

4.	***Create momentum*** - pulse surveys can be used to spark focused discussion on relevant topics during group meetings. Leaders can also gain timely data to address problems and invite employee involvement in real time.

Employee engagement surveys also allow for the capture of new ideas as well as employees are closer to the pulse of company processes, products, services and customers. They hold a valuable perspective on improvement and innovation opportunities that are often overlooked or left unexamined by senior management. Asking employees for their opinions can yield breakthrough discoveries and make changes meaningful so there is a great potential for employee buy-in and understanding. This can be particularly important to what will shortly be the largest demographic group in the workplace - the millennials, who count contributing to the greater whole as one of their key drivers.

The costs of disengaged employees are high and can reach far and deep into organizations. Engagement surveys are one of the most valuable tools to help organizations assess and address issues that cause systemic disengagement. Not only does an effectively administered and followed-up survey signal what areas need improvement but point to ways that increase productivity. They can also contribute to strengthening employee-leader relationships, supporting a climate in which employees are motivated to work harder (and smarter) and drive results. Communication lines are opened up and as a result information flows smoother, with less productivity slowdowns due to bottlenecks.

Technology is around us everyday… personally and professionally.   And for the most part, technology allows us to do things easier and quicker. As we experience firsthand the shifting workplace, we need to shift our thinking for HR tools to Employee Tools. Many HR applications are becoming tools for employees first, enabling them to better manage people, learn and develop, and steer their own careers.   This past decade we have gone from "systems of record" to "systems of engagement".[12] Today's employee is seeking applications that are fun, gamelike, and design to help improve our productivity at work, as we continue to carefully watch expenditures and to measure bottom line results.

Even though there are many people who do not have a company email or use company technology in the course of their work, most people have their own cell phone (there are now more than 2.1 billion smartphone users on the planet and Mobile Internet growth increased by 69% in 2014, and 55% of that mobile traffic is now video) and are comfortable working with that technology. As a result, there is a whole new market of mobile- and cloud- first apps starting to emerge, giving us a sense that most of our HR solutions will be running on our mobile phones, offering built-in location awareness, sensors, and even bio-monitoring tools.[13]

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[12] "The Move from Systems of Record to Systems of Engagement", Forbes / Bersin, Josh, August 16, 2012 www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2012/08/16/the-move-from-systems-of-record-to-systems-of-engagement/

[13] "Internet Trends 2015 - Code Conference", KPCB /Mary Meeker, May 27, 2015 Accessed: April 2016 http://www.kpcb.com/internet-trends

As companies look to upgrade and replace their HR technologies, they should consider vendors and tools that offer this consumer-like experience, and allow employees to test them for ease of use - rather than focusing exclusively on features and workflow capabilities.[14]

Pulse surveys can be used to discuss almost anything: workplace safety issues, workflow inefficiencies, wasted time in meetings, and suggestions about food, benefits or employee services. Ideally we should be getting a steady stream of this kind of feedback; we just need tools that can help us safely unleash the flow.

CONCLUSION

Today companies spend in the billions on annual engagement surveys worldwide and most are giving indications that they are not getting the value they want, particularly in this new work world. The traditional survey market is under a lot of pressure as the concepts and principles of employee engagement have really changed and evolved. Annual engagement metrics are not actionable enough for most managers, and frustrating for employees. While the annual survey has become an institution in many organizations, they are on the road to being replaced by pulse and "always on" systems in the next few years.

It is believed that "feedback management" is destined to become a new software category. This powerful and complex area brings pulse surveys together with manager and employee feedback, as well as anonymous feedback to create a new platform that helps organizations get a real "pulse" on all their employees' issues, needs and suggestions.

These new tools have the potential to fill the gap between what managers need to do and what people really want. They give leaders immediate feedback on the programs and actions they take. They unleash new ideas, and open the door to new work practices, and help to engage with the people.[15] We just need to give them the right opportunity to speak up, then listen and take action.

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[14] "The New Digital World of Work: How HR will Change in 2016", FORBES Business Journal, Bersin, Josh, January 29, 2016 Accessed: April 2016 http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2016/01/29/ten-predictions-for-hr-leaders-in-2016-how-the-digital-world-of-work-will-change/#4ded16fb4d11

[15] "Feedback is the Killer App: A New Market and Management Model Emerges", Forbes, Bersin, Josh, August 26, 2015 Accessed: April 2016 http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2015/08/26/employee-feedback-is-the-killer-app-a-new-market-emerges/print/

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