February 1, 2020

Pssst… Reasons to Avoid Conducting the Next Engagement Survey

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After all these years, it turns out that engagement surveys may not be all that organizations want them to be. Don't blame the survey; it does its job to collect data. That data can drive significant change when there's an action plan. If there's no action plan, reconsider issuing the next engagement survey.

For decades, organizations have used engagement surveys as a tool to help improve productivity, and attract and retain employees. Increasing profitability is the common goal of pinpointing areas of concern and resolving the issues. The challenge is not often in facilitating the survey or identifying areas needing improvement; the struggle is developing an action plan and addressing the underlying problems. That is where many organizations fail.

According to Leadership IQ (a leadership training and research firm), more than 3,000 respondents to an online quiz indicate that nearly 60% of companies are not taking meaningful action on the data from their employee engagement surveys. In our experience, Findley consultants recognize that identifying issues is the easy part of surveys.

Driving organizational change is tough.

Without getting into finite detail, the output of survey results can be grouped into several categories: culture, work life, leadership, management, rewards, communication, career path, learning and development. There are many challenges in addressing such broad topics with a survey, including:

- Were the appropriate questions asked?
- When negative responses are provided by employees, an expectation has been set that problems will be fixed. Will corrections be made?
- Generally, there are multiple root drivers for getting low scores. Does the survey provide enough data on where the problems reside?
- Those assigned to address problem areas are often the people associated with the low scores. Should an independent resource contribute to the development of a solution?
- How balanced is the approach to addressing issues? Does employee feedback carry all of the weight or are management's voices considered, as those may offer differing opinions than those expressed by the employees?
- Over-reaction is as bad as indifference or being slow to act. It can lead to rash piecemeal corrections without a holistic plan for improvement. How are survey results addressed?

Surveys by themselves will not fully define or solve organizational issues; they can contribute to identifying some negative areas in the organization, but the challenge remains for leadership to address the noted issues of concern. Moreover, improving employee satisfaction scores to higher levels does not always correlate to improved business results. Our experience shows some organizations that have high engagement scores do not carry that success into business performance. A balanced approach is needed to connect people and business expectations; organizations need to progress beyond surveys.

Engagement surveys are one piece of the equation. Similar to online candidate assessments used in recruiting, they are not the definitive answer, rather surveys are tools to measure critical areas. They become data points to be considered.

Aside from engagement surveys, companies should look at the big picture and manage to an ideal state. From Findley's experience, the most successful organizations have this core characteristics framework which connects their people and business strategy:

- Effective leadership which formally includes a people strategy within its business plan
- Trained managers who use effective goal setting, provide ongoing feedback and support their employees
- Clear job expectations, competency standards and organizational structure which supports each employee's work needs
- A performance culture which fosters open communication and supports challenges to the status quo
- Issues are addressed as they happen, they do not linger and become chronic
- An indoctrination and learning strategy connected to clear career paths
- Defined rewards strategy (base, incentive, other benefits/perks) tied to performance

These are the day-to-day fundamentals, the blocking and tackling of management and leadership that drives retention, engagement and business growth. For many organizations, however, this stated framework is not ingrained in the company's culture. Instead, they focus on symptoms found in the survey data, spending too much time on the granular points versus tending to broader core success factors.

Too often, department heads or individual managers are tasked with the follow up activity required to fix low scores. Meanwhile, the core issues reside with the broader organizational strategy and operations decisions and therefore, are rarely corrected satisfactorily.

Before performing the next engagement survey and assessing the data, step back and consider what will be done with the findings. Determine how the core characteristics of successful organizations can be incorporated into the action plan.

Questions regarding benchmarking your group benefits plan, contact the Findley consultant you normally work with, or Dave Barchet at *Dan.Simovic@findley.com*, *216.875.1917*.