

Surveying the Workplace

How do you obtain insight into your business and the thoughts and feelings of those that work for you?

If your business is small enough, there is no reason why you shouldn't be talking to your employees at all levels on a daily basis. While it would be widely recognised that doing the latter on a daily basis for larger companies is not always achievable or practical, there are other ways of finding out valuable business information about what your teams think and feel about the business and you for that matter. A key tool for gathering this information is through the use of employee surveys, questionnaires and interviews.

So what are the benefits of conducting these information gathering exercises? They can assist in:

- Increasing employee motivation and commitment
- Identifying the strengths within the business and areas for development
- Providing information on how to attract and retain key employees
- Improving performance, productivity and profitability
- Improving teamwork
- Giving direction to achieve greater customer satisfaction
- Increasing quality of product or service delivery

Employee Engagement/Culture Surveys

Businesses that are viewed as great places to work will achieve heightened performance and productivity. How well your business succeeds is largely dependent on the capabilities and motivation of your employees. As an employer, you need to ensure that the working environment is conducive to getting the best out of your employees.

This type of survey looks at how employees feel about their place of work: their physical work environment, their job, their relationships with colleagues, subordinates, managers and external stakeholders (i.e. clients/customers); how their efforts are recognised, what opportunities are available to them for promotions, training and transfers, the support offered to them by the organisation, sources of frustration, areas of satisfaction and all the bits in between. The overall aim of gathering this type of information is to implement actions that deliver performance improvement e.g. more engaged employees, more satisfied customers, and a more profitable or successful organisation.

360 Degree Individual Development Surveys

This type of survey is used as part of the employee development process. Individuals receive a full-circle of feedback on their performance, not just from one person, typically "the boss" or team leader. The information gained is beneficial in that it increases an individual's awareness of how their performance is viewed by others, and how it compares to their own view of their performance. Analysis of an employee's answers provides a more complete and realistic view of performance, reflecting the perceptions of people with whom the employee must form positive working relationships in order to perform their job effectively.

360 degree feedback is given against a set of competencies and associated behaviours linked to high performance that reflect the organisation's vision and values, translated into day-to-day behaviours.

Viewing performance in this way means the information can be used as a catalyst for change for improving an employee's performance in relation to their role and the strategic goals of the business. Recommendations based on the 360-degree feedback can highlight any issues that need addressing, both in the short and long term. They also focus on how to build on and maintain the performance and behaviours of employees to ensure that they align with the business's values and goals.

Post-Appointment Surveys

A post-appointment survey is a powerful tool to accurately pin-point gaps within the recruitment, selection, and induction process. Research has indicated that the greater the match between the initial expectations of an employee and organisational reality, the less likely this person will leave within the first 12 months of employment. By gathering feedback and evaluating the match between employee perceptions and reality, business owners can measurably improve overall business efficiency with regards to the recruitment, selection, and induction processes.

Training Evaluation Surveys

The information from this type of survey is used to analyse what type of training intervention is required to either help an employee to meet their job requirements or to develop them further to become a high performer and/or progress to a more senior role within the business.

However, this is only half the equation as it is not always just the identification of an individual employee's training needs but the training needs of an organisation as a whole. Is the business about to or has it, just undergone major change? This may relate to implementing a culture change around health and safety, new product development and production, new IT or finance systems, to the introduction of a new performance appraisal and reward system, to name just a few. Any of these examples usually require a huge commitment to training within an organisation. From the outset the organisation needs to ascertain exactly what training is required, who requires it and to what level. Hence, needing to know this kind of information has resulted in the creation of the training evaluation survey!

Training needs analysis by way of survey or questionnaire is the formal process of identifying training gaps and training needs within an organisation. An organisation's investment in training does not usually come cheap so ensuring the right training is put in place at the right time, with the right people is essential to ensure overall performance improvement across the business.

Exit Surveys

The overall goal of an exit interview or questionnaire is to identify opportunities for improvement relating to future staff employment or the business itself. They enable an organisation to respond to employee issues and elicit information on how to retain key

people. In addition, they provide a final opportunity to gather objective insights into what employees see as right and wrong with your business.

Exit surveys provide a robust framework to better understand the expectations, assumptions, motivations and drivers that contribute to an individual joining and exiting an organisation. The truth is that while an individual may be faced with some strong factors that serve to 'push' them towards leaving an organisation, they may also be faced with an equally strong 'pull' towards another organisation, role, culture or team.

Sometimes the reason for an employee leaving a business is straight forward and the circumstances for an employee cannot be influenced by the organisation, however often the situation is something the organisation can have an effect on. Often losing an employee comes at a great cost to the organisation including the loss of skills and organisational knowledge, the lost cost of investment in training and the cost of replacing the employee through recruitment and selection, training and reduced productivity while the new employee gets up to speed. In many instances, the exit interview not only tells an organisation why an employee is leaving but how a repeat of the situation might be avoided for the future.

The information gained from the exit survey can highlight trends and result in recommendations and action plans which can focus a business on continuing with what it does well and addressing areas for improvement.

Today's workplace surveys have a strategic focus in identifying the connections between employee experiences and engagement levels with bottom-line performance. Employers making use of workplace surveys can see them as a source of potential competitive advantage because they allow them to effectively manage their most important asset - their workforce.