

Are you wasting time on your employee opinion surveys?

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Most all of us do them- those annual or biannual efforts to determine the satisfaction level of our workforce. These periodic formal surveys used to be called "Employee Opinion Surveys", but a more popular term now is "Employee Engagement Surveys".

Regardless of the vendor we use, the survey will be about 100 questions that relate to a core set of critical factors. We want to see how committed our workforce is to the organization, its mission, vision, and values, and how satisfied the workforce is with how they are being managed. It is really a scorecard of management-of how well we have been doing.

Asking our employees how well we are doing is a good thing. In fact, I am a big supporter and strong proponent of these formal surveys.

I do not question the value of the survey, but we often waste our time in the reaction to the survey results.

We all handle the formal employee engagement survey in the same manner. The organization receives the survey result from the outside vendor. HR and the senior pooh-bahs go through the results to assess how good or bad the organization did.

Then they share it with the management group. The management group is charged with sharing the results for the individual departments with those areas.

The results

Typically, senior leadership and/or the management group will look at the questions in which the organization as a whole scored low. They will commit the organization to developing action plans to address these low-scoring factors. If all the low-scoring questions are not addressed, the organization will generally pick 3-5 to address.

The expectation is that each department will also develop an action plan to address the issues which were given a low score by their employees.

So the organization as a whole and each work area is off and running creating action plans, improvement teams, and a whole lot of activity to improve those low scores. Herein lies the potential waste!

Isn't improving our performance and the employee's satisfaction a good thing? Well yes, if that is what our activity will accomplish.

What's missing

What is the one thing that is missing in most employee engagement surveys (there are few vendors that do it right, so you might be the exception)?

The organization designs the survey, determines or edits the questions, then reacts to the results. Here is a critical missing factor in most surveys: We ask the employee to rate the **performance** of the organization on a specified issue but we don't ask them how **important** that issue is to them.

Several years ago, we used a vendor whose survey required two responses to each question: The first rated our performance on the given issue and the second rated the importance to the employee.

Both used a common 5 point scale . Performance scale was based upon a range that went from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The importance scale went from "relatively unimportant" to "extremely important".

What this gives you

The use of these two questions will result in all responses being categorized into one of the following quadrants:

<i>High Performance/High Importance</i>	<i>Low Performance/High Importance</i>
<i>High Performance/Low Importance</i>	<i>Low Performance/Low Importance</i>

You can see immediately how this will prioritize the employee responses and what

reaction the organization or work area should take:

- **High Performance/High Importance:** You are doing this well and it is important to the employee. Keep doing what you are doing and reinforce, if possible!
- **High Performance/Low Importance:** You are doing this well but it is not so important to the employee. Keep doing what you are doing.
- **Low Performance/High Importance:** You are not doing this well and it is important to the employee. This is the quadrant that should get your focus.
- **Low Performance/Low Importance:** You are not doing this well but it is not important to the employee. While it deserves attention, these questions are not the priority that the low performance/high importance are.

When we made this change, the responses surprised us in that some of the low-scoring questions that we would have ginned up a lot of corrective action for were unimportant to the employees.

This helped us focus our attention on what really mattered to the workforce—both organizationally and in each department. Instead of throwing action plans at every low scoring question, we were able to focus on those that were important to the staff.

Our resulting scores soared in the next survey. I think this was not only due to us focusing on the critical issues, but I think the staff could see that we were addressing what they were telling us was important.

It is worth seeing if your vendor can add this question to your survey. It requires no modification of the existing questions but simply the addition of another rating column.

Stop wasting everyone's time with action plans that aren't important to most of your staff. Instead, let your workforce tell you what really matters!.