

EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY

In this edition we present a sequel to part one of Metis Report on EOS that unearthed Employee Opinion Survey (EOS) as a construct and an essential measurement tool for understanding the state of employee engagement in any organization. In this article we argue clarity and rigor as key principles for implementing any recommendations contained in the EOS report.

Implementing
the Report

Review of Key Issues

The traditional sources of competitive advantage for firms in various markets have always been traced to distinctive competencies and the depth of skill inventory that an organization possesses. Recent emphasis on secondary value chain links such as technology and social architectural issues such as innovation and culture only goes to re-emphasize the people narrative as a timeless principle in guaranteeing organizational success. This is simply because innovation (position, process or paradigm) and social architecture are all complex constructs that are driven by human cognitive excellence and emotional intelligence. So the people factor cannot and must not be ignored by any brand that seeks competitive dominance in the global market space. That being said, understanding the role and significance of quality talent alone is insufficient to manage that strategic shift from mediocrity to relevance. Knowing how to MEASURE gaps in talent engagement will aid in unleashing the productive energies of a company's workforce.

In last week's article, we (Metis Decisions LLC) made a valiant effort in giving shape to the very fluid concept of engagement and to identify certain key parameters that distinguishes employee engagement surveys from satisfaction surveys. A quick recap we believe would give better context to today's piece which focuses on post-report implementation. It would serve a worthy purpose to rehash some of the definitions of engagement as contained in last week's article. Wellins and Concelman (2005) defined

engagement to be "the illusive force that motivates employees to higher (or lower) levels of performance." Colbert et al (2004) defined engagement in terms of a "high internal motivational state." In similar fashion, Avolio, and Shamir (2002) defined active engagement in terms of "high levels of activity, initiative, and responsibility." Extracting meaning from these definitions, the inference that engagement is a construct that synthesizes attitudinal disposition and psychological state of being, into an acceptable or preferred set of corporate behaviors, is a reasonable and useful one. Indeed that utility is proven by measurability of the concept using survey questionnaires that model the preferred or desired behaviors. Fast forwarding to today's discussion, we proceed with a hypothesis that an Employee Opinion Survey (EOS) has been conducted by a survey vendor or management consulting firm, the report has been presented to management and so the question now is how to manage change, assuming the report makes a business case for same, at least impliedly.

General Approach

There are two basic approaches which companies may consider in implementing the findings of any engagement survey, having regard for size, structure and available resources.

HOW HAPPY
ARE YOUR
EMPLOYEES?



In actuality, these approaches represent simultaneous levels of action 1planning.

Level 1 – Organization-wide Plan

At this level, the top executive management team and some selected business unit heads, conducts a review of survey results to identify key focus areas that may require change management attention within the short term i.e. the next 12 months. Divisions/branches or similar sub-organizational levels, (where available), could then formulate specific and local improvement strategies under each of the priority areas identified. These improvement strategies could be collated into an overall organizational action plan which would align with performance agreement requirements. This strategy may require progress to be reported by sub-organizational levels.

Level 2 – Strategic Business Unit Plan

Management at line and functional level must identify key priority items within their area of focus to address over the next 12 months. This level of planning is warranted especially where there are significant differences in the results for sub-organizational units. This will allow for more meaningful and relevant improvement strategies to be implemented and provides flexibility and scope to address local level issues.

Review Results-Build Consensus-Implement Change

It is important to follow through on promises after an employee engagement

survey to show management's commitment to improve deficit areas identified by the survey. It also demonstrates the value management places on employee feedback. The conversations about the survey results, and the development of action plans to improve the working environment are the most important outcomes of the survey.

It is critical to ensure that staff are involved and consulted through the planning and implementation stages of this process.

The recommended action planning process is to:

1. Discuss - Encourage comments and discussion from all team members by asking open ended questions. Making the discussion free and transparent would increase the buy-in and enhance the likelihood of implementation success. Management may choose to use focus groups, special project teams or other mechanisms for such discussions depending on needs, resources and structure. The following questions may guide the discussion to unearth nuances in the survey findings:

- ▶ Do the results on any particular item surprise you?
- ▶ Are the results on a particular item reflective of how you feel now as a team?
- ▶ What were you thinking about when you answered this item?
- ▶ What would a rating of 7 "strongly agree" look like in your work environment?
- ▶ What are we doing that makes this a strong/weak result?
- ▶ What do we need to do to improve

on this item?

2. Prioritize - Decide with your team what is most important to address from the employee survey. Focus on matters that significantly impact on the company's strategic goals and balance score card areas. Once the most important areas have been prioritized, you now need to work out a plan for action. The next step is to plan what will be done, by whom and when.

3. Plan - Decide what will be done, by whom, when and by what time. The change management process must be SMART in character. It is important to make the action plans very SMART; specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound, in order to achieve the transformational objectives of the change process.

Action plans can be documented on an action plan template or can be linked to your existing planning documentation, such as a strategic plan, operational plan or workforce plan.

4. Review - Review and follow through on scheduled tasks to ensure that the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RAM) is functioning properly.

After you have completed your action plan which details the priority areas to be addressed, what will be done, by whom and by when, it's a good idea to conduct a review.

Incorporating review/follow up into your plan ensures commitment to action, which in turn, should result in actual

improvements in subsequent survey results.

Evaluating issues must be done in accordance with the organization's vision, mission and values.

Getting Started

By and large, the main benefits of employee surveys makes it a self-justifying business case for companies that are already on board and those considering to make a shift. The benefits below should drive every company to engage a good management consulting firm or a survey vendor for this important service. Some of the benefits are:



- ▶ Identifying key determinants and barriers to service quality delivery and obtaining employee ideas for improvement.
- ▶ Helping HR directors put key employee issues and concerns on the forefront of the organization's management agenda.
- ▶ Demonstrating to employees that their views and ideas matter to management.



info@metisdecisions.com

- ▶ Identifying strengths and improvement gaps in management performance, organizational policies, procedures and technology, which will improve operational efficiency.
- ▶ Improving employee retention, which will in turn cut the costs of recruiting and retraining replacement staff.
- ▶ Improving work/home balance and reducing absenteeism;

In last week's article we provided four important keys to guide you in selecting a survey vendor. We consider it apt to reiterate for emphasis, since quality makes all the difference in maximizing returns on investment in this area.

1. Hire knowledgeable consultants who clearly understand the mechanics of employee engagement and how to measure it in order to extract from the survey results, actionable insights for better HR decisions. With a solid track record and the knowledge base, Metis Decisions LLC is uniquely positioned to deliver superior results to our corporate clients in this regard.
2. Before you approve any survey questionnaires, be certain to pay close attention to the imperceptible nuance between measures of satisfaction and that of engagement as the two concepts has different implications for management action and talent management strategy.
3. Make sure that your Service Level Agreement (SLA) fully captures all measures that focuses on unearthing the state of engagement and not just a description of work conditions that may measure satiation and not engagement.
4. As the client, you must insist that the reporting is relevant, ensuring that the recommendations derive its logic from the insights obtained through the survey and is amenable to SMART change management. Be certain to build consensus on implications of the findings and secure buy-in of business and functional heads for action planning, implementation and regular reviews for control purposes.

Metis Decisions uses a simple yet powerful cloud application to administer online surveys for our corporate clients. Our value proposition is ease of use, cost-effectiveness and insightful reporting. In our next feature, we make a strong business case for engaging a survey vendor to conduct regular employee surveys in your company.

Time?

Cost?



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