Reed

Employee satisfaction:
building a happier workforce
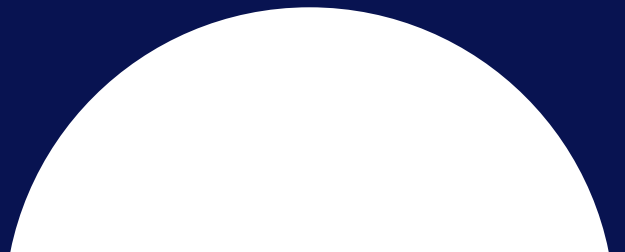
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Introduction

The aftermath of the Covid pandemic has spurred employees into making life-changing lifestyle decisions, particularly connected to their work. More than two years of enforced restrictions on freedom of movement to slow the spread of the disease has inspired millions of people to seek deeper meaning in their lives.

This year (2022), the media has focused on the phenomenon of the 'Great Resignation', which predicted that millions of workers would quit their jobs in search of roles that would afford a better work-life balance.

With this in mind, and in what is a tight labour market – with lots of jobs and few professionals to fill the roles – employee satisfaction and engagement are essential to the success of any organisation.

According to research conducted in 2021 by business insights platform Glassdoor, the three most important factors contributing to overall employee satisfaction in the UK, US, Canada, France and Germany are:

The culture and values of the organisation

The quality of senior leadership

Access to career opportunities within the organisation

Reed decided to investigate the subject of employee satisfaction to find out what people most wanted from their working lives. We conducted an employee satisfaction survey with 2,000 employees in a variety of sectors. The findings showed that, above everything, colleagues were the most-valued aspect of working for their current company, followed by flexibility in their working hours and/or location, and salary.

This guide looks primarily at the ingredients of employee satisfaction: the measures to which managers should aspire to keep their workforce satisfied, and addresses the more aspirational theme of engagement. Throughout, subject experts have shared their insight and methods for raising staff satisfaction, using tried-and-tested ideas that might be useful to integrate into your organisation.

What is employee satisfaction?

Without employee satisfaction, staff morale can fall, leading to poor productivity, increased absence, and even resignation. It also has a big impact on your employer brand and appeal to potential jobseekers.

As well as their day-to-day tasks, satisfaction is closely linked to how an employee feels about a company's style of management and organisational culture – the traits that define the business such as internal communication, staff development policies, and recognition of employee performance.

Keeping the workforce content is vital – not just in terms of motivation, but also for the company's reputation. Negative reviews can spread by word of mouth and, more devastatingly, online. Insights company Glassdoor, for example, is widely used by jobseekers searching for information about companies they might be looking to join. Statements, good or bad, from current or departed staff on their website can cause a ripple effect for the HR teams and business leaders managing recruitment.

Satisfaction vs engagement

The key thing to remember is that employee satisfaction and employee engagement measure different outcomes:

Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction covers basic concerns and needs in the workplace. A satisfied employee could do the bare minimum and be content to remain in the same role for years, enjoying the familiarity of the environment.

VS

Engagement

Engagement measures how passionate and driven employees are to help their employers succeed. An engaged employee will often put in extra effort to ensure a job well done.

Watch our video with Niamh Macaskill, Head of People Experience at Camelot, about the issues the company addressed around employee satisfaction during challenging times.

The traits that make up a good workplace can include having clear objectives and goals, a strong culture, clear internal communication, and a transparent, people-centric ethos.

To raise employee satisfaction, organisations should:

- Treat employees with respect, recognise their effort and achievements

- Encourage autonomy to inspire greater engagement and fulfilment in their role

- Regularly assess benefits and compensation

- Clearly outline expectations and provide suitable training and development to ensure growth and reduce turnover

- Understand the types of rewards and recognition that employees value

To achieve all this, organisations need to be willing to ask for employee feedback at regular intervals – and act upon it.

"A lot of companies are realising that what leads to satisfaction for one person will not for another. At Reed, we believe there are certain things that can help overall, such as a purposeful job, open and honest communication, feeling safe and like you belong, and like you are well rewarded and recognised for the work you do."

Chris Brindley, Head of Reward & Co-member Experience, Reed

Our survey – the key findings

Two thousand people over the age of 18, in full-time employment, took part in our research commissioned with OnePoll.

Though many of the findings were positive, such as 64% feeling a sense of belonging at their workplace - owed largely to the work they do (51%), feeling valued and respected for their opinions (42%), workplace friendships (41%) and freedom to be themselves (39%), other important factors such as development opportunities and support were among issues employees felt were most lacking.

Some of the most alarming statistics

Training and development

35% are not satisfied with the training and development at their workplace

Opportunities to feed back to managers

60% do not have the means to feed back through staff surveys etc., as often as they'd like, and only 39% feel senior management listen and act on feedback

Support to fulfil role requirements

30% feel only a little or no support

Rewards for good or high performance

65% say their company does not offer rewards for good or high performance

Communication and connection

Of the **15%** of respondents who do not feel connected to their workplace, **57%** state they feel undervalued and unheard

Appreciation

Of the 2,000 people surveyed, 21% don't feel very appreciated at work, and 7% feel they are not appreciated at all – alarmingly, that's over a quarter of employees that took part in the survey feeling unappreciated for the work they do. This is a detrimental number at a time when it's more important than ever to attract and retain the best talent in your organisation.

Pay and reward

On average, those polled have a personal annual income of £29,730, with 41% being on a salary of greater than £30,000.

Half of all respondents feel their pay is about right for the work they do (41% earned more than £30,000), with 36% feeling their pay is too low – a statistic that needs to be addressed to ensure employees are happy and remain content.

Interestingly, only a little over a third (35%) say their company offers rewards for good or high performance and, perilously, 53% of respondents don't.

Colleagues
Flexibility
Salary

Most satisfying elements

Survey respondents reported that the three most satisfying elements of working for their current company were their colleagues (45%), flexibility of their working hours and/or location (40%), and salary (33%).

These three ingredients are most likely to anchor employees to workplaces amidst the post-pandemic 'Great Resignation' phenomenon, in which thousands of people have quit their jobs for a better work-life balance.

What are the most satisfying elements of working for your current company?

Element	Percentage
The people I work with	45%
The flexibility of my working hours and/or location	40%
The salary I receive	33%
The nature of the business /type of business	31%
The benefits I get	22%
The company culture	21%
Other, please specify	1%
Not sure/nothing	8%

Belonging

How valuable is a sense of belonging to an employee's satisfaction? Our survey highlights positive figures (64%) for those who feel connected to their workplace with more than half of respondents citing 'enjoying the work they do' as a reason for their answer, and high percentages suggesting it's the respect earned, and friendships made, that makes their job so satisfying.

In contrast, 15% of respondents don't feel connected to their workplace or a sense of belonging. The impact of feeling 'undervalued and unheard' is likely to have a negative effect on productivity – and any percentage above zero is enough to damage a company's output or reputation in the long term.

Meaningful work

Two thirds of those polled - 66% - agree with the statement: 'My day-to-day work is meaningful to me; it instils pride and a sense of satisfaction'. Great news, but what about the third (33%) of employees who couldn't make up their minds, or disagreed that their work has meaning? It's vital to have meaningful work to ensure you are content in your role. Therefore, managers should strive to ensure the work that people do is meaningful.

In order to meet and surpass company targets and goals, employees need to sing from the same hymn sheet and be motivated to do well, for their own career development, as well as for the business. Our survey indicated positive figures (71%) being 'motivated to do their best work' for their organisation, but a large number (26%) are not motivated.

Drilling down, through focused surveys or focus groups, to find out why these employees are so dissatisfied could be a way to find out the cause and establish if there are any common themes, such as the type of work the employees do, the flexibility of their role and the training and support available to them.

How supported do you feel to confidently fulfil the requirements of your role?

Only a little
23%

Fairly
47%

Not at all
7%

Not sure
2%

A great deal
21%
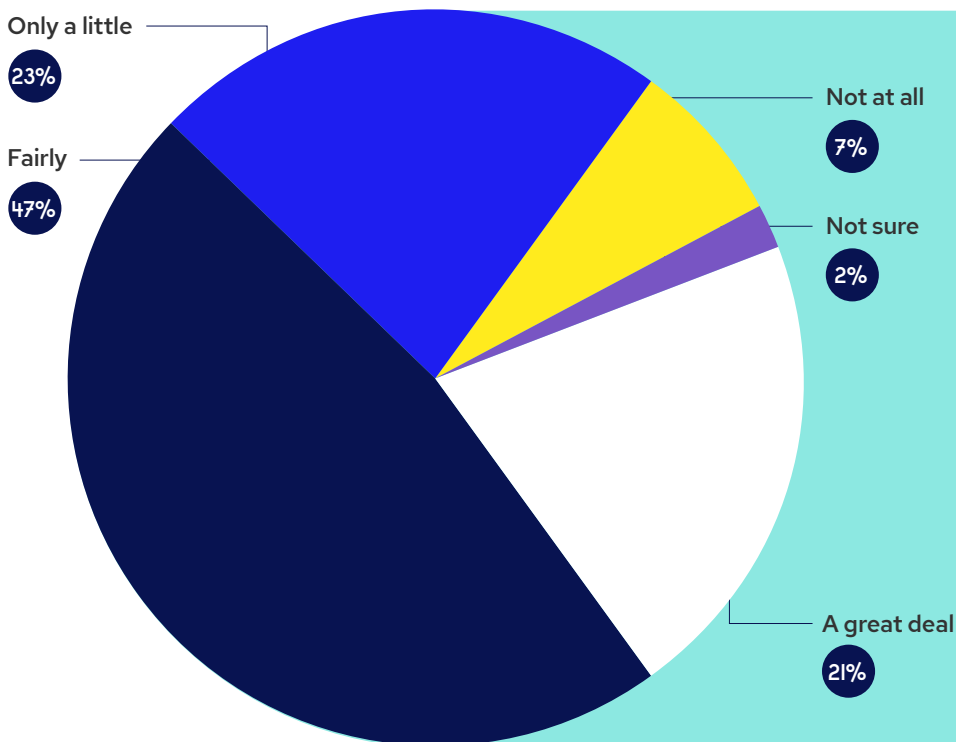
Staff turnover

Our survey showed that only 7% of those polled are looking to leave their job, but it seems it's only a temporary measure: the figures are dismal for company loyalty and longevity – just 24% think they'll stay in their current organisation for another two years, 22% expect to stay three-to-five years, and 18% plan to stay six years or longer.

Summary of results

Our survey not only indicates the current mood of UK-wide employees at a critical time in the history of work, following a global crisis, but highlights some of the key areas you need to consider when looking to ensure your employees are content, satisfied and engaged.

One thing is for sure, employees have a lot to say, that's why employee satisfaction surveys are vital in any organisation - providing you with the qualitative and quantitative data to make the right changes. You can find out more about these surveys later in this eBook.

While it's impossible to meet the needs of everyone all the time, by acting on the feedback of the majority, being willing to listen, and open to compromise, companies can reap rewards in the long term for the happiness of workers, and organisational reputation.

Eleven
ways to raise
employee
satisfaction

1

**Outline goals
and objectives**

Happiness at work ultimately depends on whether employees like what they do for the company. The basics are a fair salary and civil working conditions but, as reported by Forbes.com in their article ‘The five fundamentals of employee satisfaction’, these aren't enough to create passion and motivation.

For satisfaction at work, employees need direction and a sense of purpose that keeps them going. Therefore, leaders must be clear about their strategy and goals to help employees feel connected, valued and fulfilled.

In our survey, just 24% of respondents see themselves staying at their current organisation for another two years, and of the 36% who feel 'disconnected' to their workplace, in terms of a sense of belonging, more than half attribute this to being 'undervalued' or 'unheard'.

Disillusionment has a habit of spreading, ultimately leading to resignation. At the end of the day, we all want to do meaningful work and make a difference – it's not always just about a salary.

2

**Company
culture**

Company culture is the shared values, attributes, and characteristics of an organisation. It comprises a variety of intangible aspects, including the business' mission, goals, ethics and leadership, as well as the physical work environment.

What makes a good culture?

A good culture can be defined as one where employees have faith in their bosses, take pride in their work, and enjoy their working relationships. One hypothetical way to assess the culture of an organisation is to consider the type of decisions employees would instinctively make if senior leadership teams were not available.

Companies can improve their culture by investing time in getting to know the person behind the professional – what makes them tick, what are their interests, and what inspires them beyond the workplace?

Be honest and transparent about company or team objectives. Keep internal communication channels open, fostering a culture where employees feel comfortable sharing ordinary issues with each other and management, and where business highs and lows can be openly discussed.

Encourage training and development and inspire employees to take charge of their professional destiny by making clear the support you can offer. An employee who knows a manager has their back and values their potential is one who is likely to stay with the company for years to come.

Creating a diverse and inclusive culture

In the last couple of years, the sharp focus on the widespread lack of diversity in workplaces and boardrooms has brought about significant change. The subject has become a hot topic, but therein lies the danger that it could just as quickly go cold and be swept back under the carpet.

Those organisations still lagging should look to embrace diversity as part of their mindset. Businesses need to better reflect society if they are to forge better connections in the communities they serve, engage and inspire. Ultimately, diversity drives better business performance and better output, innovation, and greater productivity.

Inclusion is considering how to create an environment where people can be their authentic selves and celebrate their unique identities. Everyone wants to belong in a workplace where they feel valued and respected.

To create an inclusive environment, consider setting up dedicated groups focused on inclusion goals such as hiring, retaining staff, and developing employees. You could also encourage the setting up of groups within your organisation where employees from similar backgrounds can share ideas and celebrate their differences. Whether that's an LGBTQ+ forum, or a group based on a certain religion, peer-to-peer support can help build that culture.

Introduce a multifaith room where employees can pray or meditate, and overall, listen to what employees most value from their workplace by regularly checking in with them on inclusion and engagement issues.

Wellbeing is high on the business agenda. More and more employers are recognising that employees who are healthy and stress free have better productivity and a greater sense of responsibility towards their job. Incorporating corporate wellness programmes into your policies, such as stress management education and exercise classes, greater flexibility, or extra paid time off, can also have a positive impact on the culture you create for your organisation.

A change in culture, even if gradual, can be unsettling. Communicating your goals and encouraging feedback can help create a happier workforce.

3
Trust your employees to take responsibility

Without trust between you and your employees, productivity and engagement can fall. It does, of course, take time to establish, and involves some degree of risk as both you and your employees get used to each other's ways of working and expectations, but is vital to the success of your relationship and wider team morale.

Employees need guidance, but micromanaging can lead to stress on both sides. Space for creativity is important for the employee, as is room to make mistakes as they learn new skills.

Ways that managers and organisations can erode and establish trust:

- 😞 Leaders' lack of self-awareness in realising how their actions affect employees

- 😞 Organisations that restrict employee initiative

- 😞 Managers who are more concerned with meeting targets than developing employee relationships

- 🙂 Rethink organisational policies and practices to engage employees

- 🙂 Cede control and convey prudent, incremental trust. Treat any mistakes along the way as opportunities to facilitate learning

- 🙂 Share information with employees – transparency signals and inspires trust

- 🙂 Make changes, where appropriate, to engage and address the needs of all employees

- 🙂 Show employees you are invested in them and their career aspirations through programmes of training and development

4
Offer flexible working

Many people have different hours that are more productive than others. Allowing employees to set schedules and work remotely, where possible, can ensure they can work the hours when their attention is at its peak.

According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD), "there is an opportunity for employers to do more to provide flexibility for the benefit of all employees and organisations".

To implement flexible working effectively, the CIPD suggests organisations should:

- Clarify the benefits of flexible working to the organisation and to individuals

- Find the compelling hook or business imperative that will gain traction in the organisation

- Communicate to dispel myths around what flexible working is and who it's for, share successes, and build communities

- Establish a clear process for flexible working with defined roles and responsibilities for employees, line managers and HR

- Find creative ways to encourage a range of flexible working practices for all employees – both in terms of innovative flexible working initiatives and creative ways to build flexibility into job roles that have not traditionally been seen as suitable for flexible working

- Aim to hire flexibly and design the jobs to suit the flexible pattern (that is, full-time jobs are not squeezed into part-time hours)

- Ensure ongoing access to development and career conversations for flexible workers

- Gain manager buy-in through communicating benefits, sharing success stories, and providing support and guidance

- Create a supportive organisational culture, underpinned by leadership and HR support

- Measure and evaluate flexible working and learn from trials using quantitative and qualitative measures

5

Create a positive work environment

A positive work environment is the overall experience an employee shares with colleagues, line managers and the company culture.

According to employee engagement platform Vantage Circle, organisations can create a positive work environment through open communication, which leads to building trust and establishing healthy work relationships through fairness and equal opportunities.

Long-standing, troubling issues in society are finally being examined. Topics around race, gender, sexuality and age equality are no longer swept under the carpet, as greater numbers of people feel empowered to stand up for their rights and voice their opinions publicly.

As the forward thinking, modern organisation that you aim to be, it stands to reason that you want to be viewed as open and inclusive to attract the greatest talent. Therefore, ensure that when you start planning what to ask your employees in your next satisfaction survey, the questions cover how respondents feel about diversity in the organisation. Find out if respondents think the company feels inclusive, whether employees feel comfortable to be their true selves in the workplace, or if they feel minority groups are underrepresented. And at HR and management level, investigate unconscious biases at recruitment stage that may impact underrepresented groups. This could mean retraining staff and adopting a new recruitment system.

Download our free eBook 'Making tech inclusive: strategies for developing a more diverse workforce', designed to help you reflect on what's working and what's not when it comes to your I&D policies, and improve in areas you may have overlooked – useful whether or not you work in tech.

6
Provide regular feedback

Feedback can build trust and raise satisfaction – when people feel their opinions matter, they are more likely to stay engaged and motivated. A lack of employee feedback makes the employees unsure about the work and effort they are putting in.

The best ways for you to give healthy feedback are authenticity and a positive intent when giving constructive criticism.

More and more managers within companies are opting for 360-degree feedback, which offers data that highlights employees' strengths and weaknesses.

360 feedback aims to paint a full picture of an employee's performance through the anonymous feedback of multiple colleagues. Surveys of this kind are generally thought to be more valuable in terms of gaining insight into an individual's communication style, attitude, working relationships and other behaviours.

7
Rewards and recognition

Are you rewarding your workforce for work well done? If bonuses or gym memberships aren't an option, is there a different type of reward you could offer, such as buying extra holiday?

In their book, 'The 5 languages of appreciation in the workplace', Gary Chapman and Paul White highlight the importance of organisations understanding how employees like to be recognised and rewarded for their achievements. While a simple 'thank you' is enough to satisfy some employees, others will prefer more tangible appreciation such as thoughtful gifts or financial reward. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.

Appreciating and recognising employees keeps them motivated. This energises them to thrive to do better and outdo themselves. You can also offer valuable benefits and perks to your employees to boost their morale.

"The first thing to do when devising or changing a reward scheme is to build an employee profile. By that, I mean really understanding who you are targeting. What stage of their lives are they in? What's important to them? What's really going to change their behaviour? Promoting any scheme is about having a regular, planned communications campaign. It doesn't have to be complicated but plan the posts and channels you will use in advance. In this way, the scheme will stay front of mind.

"Tone of voice is important too: make sure any comms you have reflect who you are as a company, and sound as authentic as possible."

**Chris Brindley,
Head of Reward & Co-member
Experience, Reed**

Watch our video with Chris Brindley, Head of Reward & Co-member Experience at Reed, about ways companies might improve their employee reward offering.

8
Work-life balance

Long work schedules and a heavy workload often make it difficult for employees to establish a good work-life balance.

You can help by providing flexibility in working hours or schedules and having an open-door policy to encourage employees to express any anxieties.

Work-life balance is imperative for employees, but it also affects the organisation. Employees who can put equal importance on their wellbeing are undoubtedly happier and more satisfied. And this does reflect in their performance and behaviour at work.

"One of our quick wins for raising satisfaction was blocking out 'meeting-free' time in calendars, twice per week. We also simplified our communications forums and introduced 'Recharge Fridays' last summer, allowing employees to finish work at lunchtime. Medium term, we extended people's choice to return to the office. In the long term we have we introduced six wellbeing days annually, where all our employees can switch off and re-energise together."

**Thought leader:
Katie Whitehouse,
HR Director UK&I, ServiceNow**

9
Involve and engage

The best way to encourage employee engagement is to get your employees fully involved – to hear them out in need, make them realise that they are equally important, and that their contribution and hard work are always appreciated.

Involving your employees gives them more autonomy for better performances, and in turn, your organisation will be rewarded with their loyalty and dedication.

To involve employees, you could consider using suggestion boxes as well as traditional surveys as remote options, and periodical, in-person, all-staff meetings that celebrate achievements, allow Q&A sessions with senior leadership team members, as well as provide business updates.

"Your managers are closest to employees and have a big influence on attitudes and morale, so make sure they are 100% on board to avoid getting low response rates. An engaged and informed manager will champion your survey and encourage their team to take part. These managers are also more likely to commit to post-survey actions and deliver meaningful change.

"Employees might be wary about anonymity, disenchanted by past surveys, or want to take part but feel they don't have the time. Remote, deskless and office-based staff must be able to access your surveys. These are all things to tackle in your employee survey comms to ensure a good response rate."

Thought leader: Carolyn Nevitte, Director, People Insight

10
Develop employee skills

Employee development boosts job satisfaction and increases work efficiency. Encouraging employees to develop their skills signifies that, along with your organisational growth, you care about their career development.

Employee training and development generally implies a programme that helps employees acquire knowledge and skills, to improve their job performance and career growth. This helps organisations to form a skilled workforce that is motivated, ready to face challenges and are updated with the newest technology, to thrive in this rapidly evolving environment.

However, assumptions can be wrongly made about individuals who prefer to remain in the same role for years, or who seem unmotivated. It could be a lack of confidence that keeps them from challenging themselves: they might long to move up the ladder but fear failure or new responsibilities.

For advice on how managers can give the best possible learning and development experiences to their team, regardless of budget or expertise, see our eBook 'A manager's guide to learning and development'.

Evaluate and measure satisfaction

Decide the best method for your organisation: this could feature surveys, employee suggestion boxes, focus groups and one-on-one reviews, or a mix of these things.

Deciding how often to do this is equally important – too often and employees start to lose interest; not often enough and employees start to think management don't care.

"Sometimes employees demonstrate low satisfaction because they are frustrated with process, don't have resources they need, or there are other blockers in the organisation that add frustration into their day. Identifying these blockers through your employee surveys and acting on them might not cost anything."

Thought leader: Carolyn Nevitte, Director, People Insight

Case study

ServiceNow's winning formula for employee satisfaction

Software company ServiceNow won Glassdoor's Best Places to Work 2022. The company's success could well be attributed to their dedicated programme, launched five years ago, to 'build different – better – employee experiences'.

Among the changes since 2017 are a [focus on diversity and inclusion](#), a drive that has seen a five percent increase in women in leadership roles, and a five-point plan to help employees do their best work. This plan covers giving employees a voice, workforce training, equity for all, lobbying for good, and recruiting and career advancement.

Katie Whitehouse, HR Director UK&I, ServiceNow, explains how the company maintains high levels of employee satisfaction

There's no one-size-fits-all approach, but companies need to really prioritise the factors that will drive engagement. For ServiceNow, we have 15 factors, including wellbeing, collaboration and communication, diversity, equity and engagement, and learning and development. We then designed a survey around these factors in a very measurable way, so they can be understood and implemented.

Whether you use a provider or your own tools to gather responses, be sure the data can be cut into different layers - length of employment, role, gender and so on. This will give a better indication of how different groups are feeling - ideally, you want there to be no difference across the board!

It's also important to note that survey fatigue is a real issue. Because it's so important to show your commitment to hearing feedback and taking action, my advice would be to keep it simple. Take the data and offer two or three things that make a real difference short-term. This way, employees see results, and how surveys are actioned.

Timing is everything

We conduct regular surveys. Our April Employee Voice Survey helps managers and teams identify key priorities for the year ahead. The October Pulse Survey helps teams check they're on track with these priorities. And then, our additional wellbeing surveys during the pandemic allowed us to ensure employee needs always remained front of mind.

It's only with these regular surveys that we're able to truly identify the issues our employees face, and work with them to make changes for the better. That said, we never incentivise surveys, our goal is to take concrete action, and incentivising survey completion can not only give us a false sense of engagement for us, it can appear inauthentic to our employees.

Key insights

We've found empathy, flexibility and trust are what our employees value most about ServiceNow. People want to be understood and feel cared about, and it's important that we make that happen. That's why we schedule quarterly growth conversations between employees and managers to discuss their growth and progress, but also their learnings and new approaches for the road ahead. We also encourage our employees to talk openly about their wellbeing and encourage managers to build and maintain connections regarding life outside ServiceNow.

This environment of openness really came into its own during the pandemic. At the height of Covid-19, we conducted additional wellbeing surveys to keep a constant finger on the pulse of our employees and ensure we were doing the utmost to support them. It's through these additional surveys that we

discovered, for example, that employees really valued the flexibility around working hours and location prompted by the pandemic. As a result, we built a new range of three 'work personas' that allow our employees to work in a way that suits them best, whether in-office, flexible or remote.

Building trust

Despite this flexibility, we don't watch our employees' clock in and clock out. How they choose to service our customers, with our support, is up to them. This trust not only results in greater productivity, it creates greater engagement and connection, too.

It's important to establish medium and long-term initiatives to ensure we're driving real, company-wide change and show employees they're being heard.

The value of the employee satisfaction survey

Without employee satisfaction, staff morale can fall, leading to poor productivity, increased absence, and even resignation. It also has a big impact on your employer brand and appeal to potential jobseekers.

A well-designed, well-timed employee satisfaction survey can reap rewards for your business in the long term, maintaining a workforce that can be trusted to deliver. Surveys shouldn't just be saved for times of hardship.

A seemingly contented, productive employee who has spent years with a company might in fact be harbouring resentment that they'd only share in an anonymous survey. Drilling down to discover the views of all members of staff, at regular intervals, can enlighten you in the overall mood, provide insight about topical issues, such as flexibility, and allow you to address concerns raised by the majority.

However, an employee satisfaction survey will not diagnose key factors that can help an organisation improve engagement and performance. For engagement insight, employers must dig deeper to understand what motivates their workforce. Is it, for example, a strong sense of purpose, a love to be challenged, the excitement of learning new skills, or passion and commitment to improving performance and workplace results?

"Employee satisfaction is made up of several aspects, as captured in the PEARL model: purpose, enablement, autonomy, reward and leadership. Reward is only one aspect, so while organisations might reach for pay as a tool to improve, other aspects of satisfaction can be more significant – or, as we call them, more important drivers of employee engagement.

"Behaviour of leaders and managers has a significant impact. Creating a culture where leaders and managers treat employees with empathy and respect, and take interest in them doesn't have to cost a lot. If line managers know their people, notice the effort their team put in, and say thank you for work well done, it has a significant impact. Similarly, trusting employees to do their job without looking over their shoulder, empowering them to make decisions creates autonomy – a real driver of satisfaction.

"Companies with an engagement strategy provide informal and formal learning experiences to create significant opportunities for employees. Engaged employees will often snatch up these opportunities. Satisfied employees often will not."

Thought leader: Carolyn Nevitte, Director, People Insight

"Since the Covid pandemic, people have had the chance to reflect and reprioritise what is important in their lives. Also, as the cost-of-living crisis bites, people are less satisfied with reward decisions.

"Though better use of technology has helped keep people connected and working collaboratively, people report higher levels of social isolation.

"Organisations need to take these trends seriously and look at ways to support colleagues around workload, stress, and social connection and find ways to support them financially outside of traditional pay mechanisms."

Matthew McDonnell, Director of Employee Experience, Willis Towers Watson

Best practice – designing a satisfaction survey

Surveys have traditionally been the method for companies to monitor staff satisfaction. Carefully chosen questions delivered to an employee's inbox, with or without incentive, have provided the foundations on which companies build their policies and shape their culture.

However, this can be slow, and risks organisations acting on out-of-date information. The more modern approach is a more agile listening strategy. This includes annual in-depth surveys plus more frequent, lighter pulse services which help organisations keep up with change, monitor progress and consider a wide range of topics, such as engagement, diversity and inclusion and employee wellbeing.

The types of questions to include should be considered by all department leaders to ensure every aspect of working life is covered. It should include questions about the organisation, departments/teams, line manager, role and compensation, work-life balance, and diversity.

Watch our video with Matthew McDonnell, Director of Employee Experience at Willis Towers Watson, about best practice solutions to help keep employee satisfaction high.

There's a lot of organisational psychology expertise around employee surveys. This includes question design based on scientifically-developed models, making sure you collect robust, actionable data and ensuring colleagues feel reassured about confidentiality and motivated to respond. A third-party employee survey provider should be able to help you with these aspects of monitoring employee satisfaction and avoid common pitfalls.

The way organisations go about the listening programme is critical to their success. While listening via surveys and reviewing results is great, colleagues will only feel satisfied, or engaged, if they see action happen because of their feedback. If they are involved in making change happen – even better!

Most employee surveys today focus entirely on traditional workplace topics like engagement, leadership, and manager effectiveness, or lifecycle surveys focus on traditional workplace milestones like onboarding, promotion, and exit.

When you consider a new definition of employee experience, one that includes the human experience at work, a much broader spectrum of employee listening is required. The ways we listen to employees, gathering their input and perspective, need to change too. Employee surveys need to pivot to also assess how your employees feel about their preparation for retirement or how they are managing life with a newborn. They need to seek to better understand what your organisation can do to help.

Download our sample survey questions

10 ways to improve your survey response rate

1. Pick the right time to launch the survey
2. Communicate effectively throughout
3. Have a great user experience and make it easy to complete
4. Use incentives or competitions (if right for your organisation)
5. Keep an eye on response rates in real-time
6. Create time and space for all staff to complete it in work time
7. Have leaders, managers and champions help demonstrate how important participation is
8. Ensure people believe and trust the confidentiality of their responses
9. Only survey at the rate you can take action
10. Commit to acting on the results

Survey pitfalls to avoid

There are many pitfalls to avoid with employee surveys. Here are some examples of mistakes that can set organisations back in their research, according to employee engagement experts People Insight:

- Managers aren't kept in the loop
- Your survey comms falls flat
- It launches at the wrong time
- A poor response rate
- Employee surveys are seen as 'a HR thing'
- Missing the bigger picture in your survey results
- Only sharing the positive feedback
- Nothing happens next...

"In most organisations, the employee survey is organised by the HR department. While it makes sense for one department to take the lead, everyone has a role to play in your survey. Without the commitment of leaders, managers and employees across the business, you risk your survey being seen as a siloed event, without much importance outside of HR."

Thought leader: Carolyn Nevitte, Director, People Insight

Insight –
using survey data to implement change

Survey data can be hard to swallow. It might challenge your views, raise uncomfortable truths, or knock an initiative that you'd worked on. Faced with results like this, organisations might choose to dismiss the 'bad' feedback and look at what to celebrate instead. The consequence is that employees don't see their feedback reflected in the results. This can undermine their faith in your organisation and future surveys.

Different opinions in your survey results represent a great opportunity to delve deeper. Focus groups are useful for exploring the 'why' behind particular results, and getting employees involved in finding solutions is very empowering.

You might find that particular teams, departments or groups feel a certain way, so you can concentrate action to meet their needs on a local level. Where there is division, it's important to communicate this back honestly and transparently to employees, explaining why you can or can't take things forward for the business.

Most importantly, your survey is only as good as what comes next. Often there's a flurry of activity while your survey is live, which fades once it's over. Then, HR feel frustrated about chasing people for updates. Managers struggle to find time for post-survey actions. Leaders have moved on to the next business priority. Worst of all, your employees feel resentful their feedback has been ignored. The single most important advice for organisations is to ensure that your survey is followed up with meaningful action.

One way to generate high employee satisfaction is to focus directly on those areas that matter most to employees – and regularly review these areas of focus to ensure they remain relevant.

You might, for example, focus on career development and growth, better work-life integration, and fostering a sense of belonging. By zeroing in on these areas, you enable your employees to be transparent about their ambitions for the future, and also feel confident bringing their authentic selves to work.

A range of concrete initiatives also help keep lines of communication open and ensure employees feel heard and supported.

"I think that flexible benefits will become much more normal in all companies as the tech is becoming more accessible and some of the barriers around administration are becoming easier. In terms of reward schemes more generally, I think that companies should continue to try and develop schemes that relate to performance and encourage increased productivity, as issues around recruitment and retention continue to play out.

"You learn over time and respond to employee feedback – collect it regularly and over various stages of the employee lifecycle. Perhaps try to think about what could make your company different, and better, than its competitors, and stand out in a crowded sector."

Chris Brindley, Head of Reward & Co-member Experience, Reed

Final thoughts – the future of employee satisfaction

Organisations that increased employee satisfaction through the pandemic were those who led with empathy, with leaders and managers communicating honestly, frequently and informally – leaders who shared the vision, but also the difficulties their organisation faced.

It's been a reflective time, with many considering their values, their lifestyles, and making significant changes, including careers, hence the 'Great Resignation'. In the tight labour market we face now, the organisations with clear purpose and inclusive cultures, who trust their people to work with flexibility, and who take employee career development seriously are the ones who have the most satisfied employees.

To be an 'employer of choice' in the future, employers cannot merely offer competitive rewards, development opportunities, and healthy company culture. They'll need to provide a consistently positive employee experience as well. It will no longer be about attracting and retaining employees, but more about creating a positive joining, developing, and staying experience.

There's always more that can be done: people and their needs will always change, so it is important not to stagnate. In focusing on your employees and establishing greater diversity within your business, you will better reflect society.

Thank you

Many thanks to the thought leaders for their help with this eBook:

Carolyn Nevitte, Director, People Insight

Business management consultants, **People Insight**, specialise in helping companies transform the way they work through innovations in employee insight.

Matthew McDonnell, Director of Employee Experience, Willis Towers Watson

Willis Towers Watson (WTW) specialise in employee insights. They define employee experience as the sum of the moments that matter in an employee's daily life in an organisation. The tools they use help companies capture, assess and implement change are engagement surveys, focus groups, analytics, and rewards optimisation.
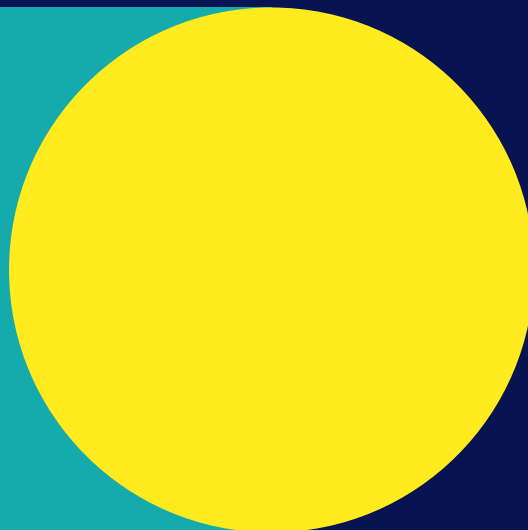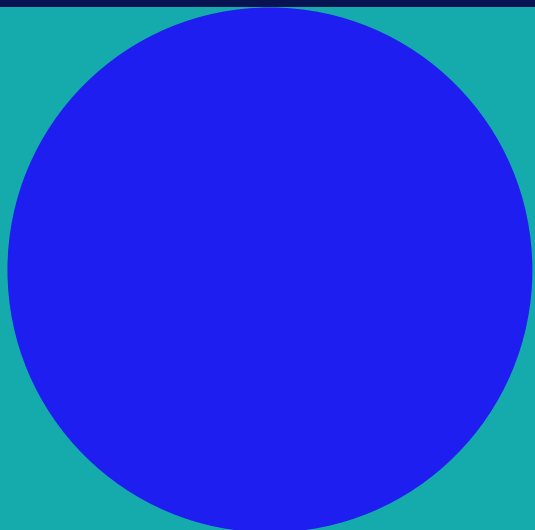
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Glassdoor is the worldwide leader on insights about jobs and companies. Built on the foundation of increasing workplace transparency, Glassdoor offers insights into the employee experience powered by millions of company ratings and reviews.

Katie Whitehouse, HR Director UK&I, ServiceNow

ServiceNow was voted no. 1 in the Glassdoor Best Places to Work 2022 (UK) survey. The company delivers digital workflows that create great experiences and unlock productivity.