

# Prioritising actions following an Employee Satisfaction Survey

Top management in many organisations would agree that they should take an interest in how their employees feel about their working lives. Employees who identify with and feel positively towards the organisation and its objectives are likely to perform more effectively than those who don't. So it makes sense to conduct a regular Employee Satisfaction Survey, perhaps annually.

Having completed the survey, though, it can be tricky to decide what action should be taken in response to the survey's findings.

## Urgent versus Important

I was on a time management course many years ago where the facilitator made the distinction between urgent tasks and important ones. Many urgent tasks aren't all that important and failing to complete an urgent task on time often doesn't cause any problem at all. He pointed out that if you spent the time necessary to complete all the urgent tasks, regardless of their importance, you might never get round to doing the important things.

So the smart thing to do is to be aware of the importance of each task as well as its urgency; and concentrate first on the things that are important and urgent, then allocate time to things that are important but not so urgent. And be prepared to skip the things that are not important.

## Employee Satisfaction Survey results

There is a similar issue to address when you are planning initiatives following an Employee Satisfaction Survey.\*

*\*Or a Client Satisfaction Survey. This article is concerned with Employee surveys but the principles apply equally to surveys among clients and customers.*

The survey will have asked about a number of different aspects of your people's experience at work and you can probably identify the ones that people are most and least satisfied with.

Having done that, it seems obvious that you should take action to address the issues that people are least happy about.

It is certainly important to take action and be seen to do so. If staff perceive that nothing happened as a consequence of the survey, they will soon conclude that it

### Survey Topics

The aspects of work you ask about might include topics like *Immediate management; Senior management; Working environment; Teamwork and people; Learning & development; Communication; The organisation overall; Pay & benefits; and Job content*. The questionnaire would include several questions under each of these headings and those questions are then *clustered* to provide an average result for the topic.

The above list of topics is just an example. The topics your survey covers should be chosen to suit your organisation and its current needs. You may well choose also to include a measure of engagement.

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was a pointless exercise. The response rate next time you conduct the survey will probably suffer. Why would anyone bother to fill out another questionnaire if there is no evidence that anybody took any notice of the last one? So after the survey, you must publish a summary of the findings, and take action to bring about improvement of some kind. And you would be wise to keep publicising what is being done, and the fact that the survey results prompted it. Then, people will see the point and those that didn't bother the first time might decide to participate in a subsequent survey and have their say.

But are the things that people were least satisfied with necessarily the best things to aim your initiatives at?

## Importance

Just as the tasks on a to-do list can be rated both for urgency and importance, the aspects of people's experience at work can be assessed on two different scales: satisfaction **and** importance. Most questionnaires invite people to respond to each question by rating their experience as good bad or indifferent but few go on to ask how much people care about each matter addressed. To allow the most meaningful analysis, the questionnaire should allow informants to provide their feedback on both these measures.

The simplest way will be to provide two different response frames for every question; one for the informant to indicate their satisfaction with the matter, and another for them to say how much it matters to them. But the questionnaire for an Employee Satisfaction Survey is usually a fairly long one anyway and making two questions out of every one will make completing it even more of a chore, which will reduce the response rate. Instead of doing that, we can provide a short block of questions at the end of the questionnaire where we ask informants to rate the importance of each aspect of their experience at work.

Once you have gathered both satisfaction ratings and importance ratings from employees, you can tell apart the issues that people are dissatisfied with but which don't matter much to them from those they're dissatisfied with and which do matter to them.

Let's say you pick on some aspect of their experience at work that your people tell you is currently pretty poorly handled. However bad they think you are at it, your investment of effort and resources to improve won't achieve much if the thing you improve doesn't matter to your people. It will be better to choose something that people care about, even if they don't rate it quite as unsatisfactory as the other thing.

To prioritise the issues to address, we need a way of combining dissatisfaction and importance ratings to derive a single measure that we might call Priority for Action (PFA).

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Then, you can report and chart the PFA's of the various aspects of people's experience at work that you have chosen to measure. It is helpful to aggregate all the responses across the organisation and compare the priorities. It is often even more revealing to compare that overall profile with those for specific groups of informants (subsets) chosen from within the overall response. For example, you may define groups by reference to the department or function people work in, and one department might show a marked difference from the organisation "norm".

Provided that the differences are statistically significant, they represent genuine Management Information about how People Feel. By Management Information we mean information like any other data you would include in a Management Information System; not just to record what is happening, but to allow the feature being measured then to be managed. In this case, that feature is how positively your people feel toward the organisation, or in other words, how engaged they are. This is a measure which will have a huge impact on the success of the organisation, but which in most organisations is not managed as other influences on success or failure are.

## Managed

By managed, we mean the familiar closed loop process as follows:

1. State a target or standard (Plan or budget figure) and a method of measurement
2. Measure actual performance
3. Compare actual performance against the target
4. Management interventions to correct any shortfall
5. Start the process at 1 again for the next period

Few organisations would be content to muddle through without monitoring and managing a wide range of influences on the success of the enterprise. Measures which are managed almost always include revenue, costs under a range of different headings, and profit. They may also include measures like receivable average days outstanding, utilisation or occupancy rates appropriate to the industry, revenue per unit and many, many more whose effect on the overall result may be much more tenuous than employee satisfaction or engagement.

If your organisation doesn't truly manage employee satisfaction / engagement, why would you choose to miss out on such an opportunity to contribute to the pursuit of excellence?

## PFA

Conducting a regular Employee Satisfaction Survey provides the necessary measurement of Employee Satisfaction and / or engagement to allow those features to be managed. Reporting PFA will make it easier to choose the management interventions which will produce the best result.

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In the following example, the questions in the questionnaire have been clustered as measures of the nine named aspects of the experience at work. At the end of the questionnaire, these nine aspects appeared, each with a brief description of what it covers and an importance rating for staff to choose from.

The table above the chart shows how the PFA figures are constructed.

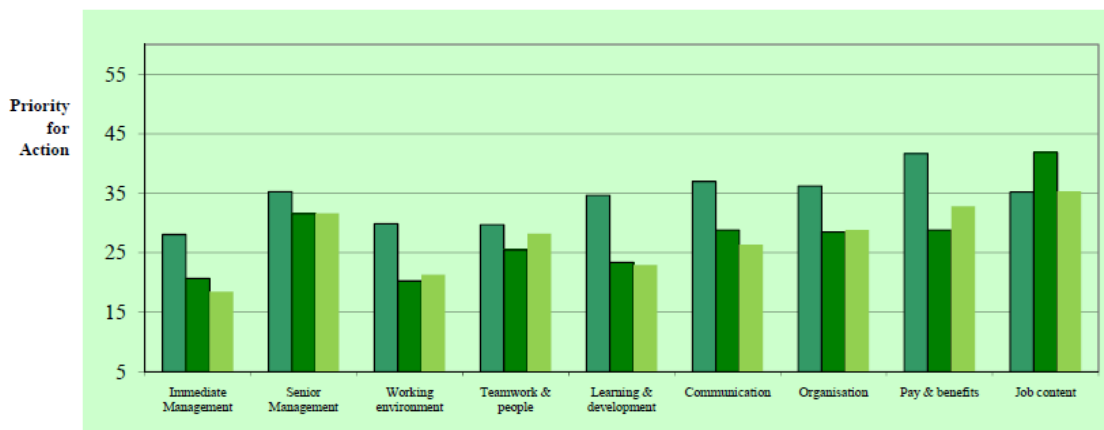
**Priority for Action Chart** Mean Devn 8.0

Subsets Benchmark: 1 Whole Survey (258)

This Subset CY: 22 HQ (29)

This Subset PY: 22 HQ (37)

	Immediate Management	Senior Management	Working environment	Teamwork & people	Learning & development	Communication	Organisation	Pay & benefits	Job content
Satisfaction Index	77	59	74	72	68	68	62	64	54
Dissatisfaction Index	23	41	26	28	32	32	38	36	46
Importance Index	90	77	78	91	73	90	75	80	91
Priority for action	21	32	20	25	23	29	29	29	42



The first row shows a satisfaction index as a score out of 100, derived from the aggregate of all responses from informants in the subset (in this case, only the 29 informants in HQ) to all the questions included in each of the nine aspects.

In the second row, the satisfaction index is subtracted from 100 to provide a Dissatisfaction index. The third row shows the Importance the informants in this subset gave to this aspect, also expressed as a score out of 100.

The PFA figure in the fourth row is an arbitrary number produced by multiplying the Dissatisfaction index by the Importance index and dividing by 100. It doesn't mean anything except when compared with the PFA for other aspects, or for the same aspect in another subset.

The chart shows the PFA measures from the current year (CY) and prior year (PY) compared with the whole survey average. The taller the bar, the higher priority this aspect demands within this subset. The profile for the whole survey highlights the aspects which demand attention overall but comparisons between the subset profiles often show different priorities in different areas of the organisation. These may be departments, or job categories, age groups or one sex or another. The

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comparisons possibly depend on the classifications the questionnaire asked people to respond to.

## **Return on Investment**

Finding the highest priority isn't the end of the story. When reviewing the aspects that emerge with the highest priorities, we need to consider the probable cost of any initiative which might bring about an improvement.

For example, if two aspects had emerged with roughly equal PFA's and one was Pay & benefits and the other Recognition, the cost of influencing satisfaction on each should be considered. We may conclude that improvement in satisfaction with Pay & benefits will come with a big price tag, whereas satisfaction with Recognition might be improved by a relatively inexpensive programme designed to raise managers' awareness of the issue.

It is important also to avoid taking on too much all at once. Change often calls for concentrated effort on the part of many people through the organisation and to get all those people to commit to the need for change and make the effort required to achieve it, can be a big challenge. It is important to set a realistic target for the change programme. Taking on too much at once may lead to nothing being achieved.

A2Z can help you develop your survey, operate it, report the results and then decide on the interventions to be introduced. Our change management consultants can then support you through the change programme to maximise your chances of success.

## **Author**

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## About the Author

### David Lusty

David has a background in HR management, including 10 years as head of HR at Avis. For 20 years since then he has worked as a Consultant. His clients have included Ashurst Solicitors, BNP Paribas, Harrow Council, IOD, Staples and Toyota.

Specialising in conducting Employee Satisfaction Surveys, Client Satisfaction Surveys and 360° Feedback programmes, he works with clients to provide objective data to identify the need for change and then measure what has been achieved.

A Member of CIPD, David is a Certified Management Consultant.

### About A2Z

A2Z is a consortium of over 100 experienced business experts. David is a member of the A2Z HR Team.

A2Z adds real value to businesses by combining diverse expertise to deliver a bespoke solution to solve a business critical issue. For more information on the A2Z HR Team, please click [here](#).

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