



A REGULAR EMPLOYEE SURVEY AND FOLLOW-UP PROCESS HIGHLIGHTING EMPLOYEES' WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO PERFORM ALONG WITH THEIR MAJOR DRIVERS

Employee Engagement Survey

Publication date: March 2016
Updated: December 2019

GERMANY

The Employee Engagement Survey is an online questionnaire in which employees assess their own engagement at work (Engagement Index) and the substantial influencing factors related to the work environment. The Federal Employment Agency considers employee engagement as one of the key prerequisites to improving PES performance. With this in mind, the survey focuses on topics that indicate good working relationships and conditions at PES staff level, such as leadership, collaboration, communication and identification.

Name of the PES

Federal Employment Agency.

When was the practice implemented?

Between 2013 and 2017, the Employee Engagement Survey has been conducted four times to ensure its effectiveness and continuous improvements. Since 2017, the survey is performed every four years, allowing more time to implement improvement strategies. The new rhythm also reduces the overall amount of feedback asked of employees, since they are also required to fill in other surveys such as risk assessments.

Which organisation was involved in its implementation?

The survey was developed in cooperation with researchers at Jacobs University Bremen and VU Amsterdam. Its advancement was also supported by the University of St. Gallen. Both universities use the data for further analysis, such as the relationship between engagement and performance. The HR policy team at the National Department of Staff and Organisational Development is responsible for the development and implementation of the survey. It is conducted by an internal centre for customer and staff surveys at head office.

Which groups were targeted by the practice?

The results of the Employee Engagement Survey are aggregated and reported to each management level, including team and division managers, so that follow-up processes can be started to improve working relations and conditions. In 2017, more than 3 400 detailed result reports were provided for managers, ranging from team reports over results for all 156 local employment agencies up to a summary report for the entire organisation. In order to secure the anonymity of employees, team reports are only provided if at least four team members have participated.

What were the practice's main objectives?

The aim of the Employee Engagement Survey is to promote good working relationships and environments and to strengthen employee-oriented leadership and collaboration. Therefore, executive feedback was implemented in 2017. Instead of measuring employee satisfaction, the survey considers engagement as a cognitive, emotional, and behavioural pre-condition to performance.

What activities were carried out?

The development of the empirically founded and tested Engagement Survey was carried out in cooperation with Jacobs University Bremen and VU Amsterdam. The index consists of 19 statements reflecting the employees' own engagement and covers the following five topics: Employee loyalty, workability, communication, willingness to strive and identification.

To successfully implement the tool, practitioners (local managers, HR representatives, employees from regional directorates) were involved in endorsing the survey. In addition, 'coordinators' were nominated in each regional directorate to promote the survey and help managers analyse the results.

In order to support follow-up processes and identification of potential improvements, 31 statements comprising the major drivers of engagement were tested in ten local business units and added to the survey in 2017. These questions belong to the following six areas of work environment: leadership, collaboration, promotion and development, information, organisation and content of work, participation and diversity.

Employees anonymously answer on a scale from one ('I totally agree') to six ('I totally disagree') to the 50 statements in total. Finally, employees can also leave comments on positive feedback or suggestions for improvements.

There is a structured follow-up process with a focus on dialogue-based activities for all teams/divisions, local employment agencies, regional directorates and the head office. In workshops, managers and employees discuss how to improve low-scoring areas within the PDCA-cycle (Plan, Do, Check, Act). Depending on individual results, managers can also consider certain sections of the survey with other data (sick leave rates, risk assessment, work-life balance measures). Moreover, the Engagement Index (19 statements regarding own engagement) has been included in the target agreement of top-managers and therefore linked to performance related payments. Since 2016, the implementation of the follow-up process is also an optional part of the target agreement for all managers.

What resources and other relevant organisational aspects were involved?

The Employee Engagement Survey was developed by external and internal staff, and resources from all levels are used to implement it. The development and advancement of the survey was supported by researchers at Jacobs University Bremen, VU Amsterdam and University of St. Gallen. The overall results are analysed by employees of the department for HR policy at the head office. Two members of the national HR department coordinate it, together with coordinators at the regional level. At the local level, managers and HR representatives are responsible for organising follow-up activities.

What were the source(s) of funding?

Internal funding.

What were the outputs of the practice: people reached and products?

Participants:

In 2017, there were around 36 000 participants. Approximately 18 000 comments are included in the analysis every year.

Data analysis:

Results are available for managers in the management information system. The results are made transparent in internal communications to all employees.

Products:

- ▶ Guidance handbook for managers to support the follow-up processes;
- ▶ Information flyers for employees;
- ▶ Managers are supported by specialist HR advisors;
- ▶ Integration into general manager qualification;
- ▶ Seminar "Employee-oriented leadership" available for all managers;
- ▶ Best-practice database for the exchange of successful measures;
- ▶ Training material for coordinators at regional directorates;
- ▶ Workshops to discuss the survey with the head office.

What outcomes have been identified?

The Employee Engagement Survey is an empirically founded model to identify areas relating to employee engagement that impact on individual and organisational performance. Scientific analyses based on the 2013–2017 survey data show that higher scores in Engagement Index of local business units generate a significantly higher customer satisfaction over years. Moreover, an analysis conducted by the University of St. Gallen indicates that higher scores of employee engagement are connected to lower short-term absences in local business units. This underlines the importance of fostering engagement for organisational success.

In addition, the results of the Employee Engagement Survey have been widely used. At the local level, measures to improve results have already been successful. For example, the agency with the worst results in 2015 implemented measures which generated a 0.4 (on a scale from 1 to 6) improvement in the 2017 results. In total, there has been an overall annual improvement of 0.1 of the national index in every year the survey was conducted. This is a major achievement for a group of more than 30 000 respondents in such a short time.

At national level, the results are used to develop evidence-based HR policies and in business units and teams the results represent the starting point for planning and implementing improvement measures.

What are the lessons learnt and success factors?

Lessons learnt and success factors:

- ▶ Combination of an empirically funded model and a transformational change management strategy for implementation that involves a wide range of employees, managers, work councils and employees representing certain interests (gender, disability). It is important that results are communicated transparently at all stages of the follow-up process.
- ▶ Implementing such a survey needs time. A continuous discussion at all levels is important to discuss questions, revisions or follow-up.
- ▶ The results should not be seen in isolation, they rather need to be integrated into wider HR policy to support internal processes.
- ▶ The Employee Engagement Survey is transferable to other organisations that aim to improve working conditions and relationships in a participative process not only by conducting a survey, but also by developing and implementing measures involving employees and supervisors at all stages.
- ▶ It is worth focusing on employee engagement for operational/organisational success.



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