

Employee Opinion / Engagement Surveys: A Tool for Employee Retention

Most companies today are concerned with employee retention. They should be. According to conservative estimates, the cost of replacing an employee is a staggering 1.5 times the annual salary. The monetary cost is even more profound when other data on employee turnover is considered. For example, some recent surveys indicate that approximately 40 percent of the workforce does not plan to be with the same employer in two years. Some of MRA's own employee opinion/engagement data indicates that 20 percent to 30 percent of employees surveyed say that it would not take much to get them to leave their current employer.

While it can be argued that some amount of turnover is healthy, it is most costly and disruptive when the employees leaving are the most productive and loyal employees—employees who can be described as “engaged.” Turnover is particularly frustrating when the loss of outstanding employees could have been prevented if management had known about potential causes of turnover before it actually occurred.

While good exit interviews can certainly provide some indicators as to the causes of turnover, they are, by nature, after-the-fact. In addition, exit interviews may not give a true picture of the causes of turnover because many employees do not wish to burn bridges when they leave, so they are not entirely candid. In some instances, an exit interview can even be discounted because it came from someone who was not considered a good employee. Finally, exit interviews do not provide a comprehensive view of what the rest of the workforce is thinking.

The most comprehensive and proactive metric for measuring employee sentiment is a solidly constructed and administered employee opinion/engagement survey. Surveys can lead to the identification of problem areas before they become real obstacles. Well-constructed surveys, such as those conducted by MRA, cover the topics that research has shown to be important to retaining the best employees:

- Management effectiveness.
- Supervisory effectiveness.
- Working conditions.
- Communications.
- Compensation and benefits.
- Quality and productivity.
- Work-life balance.
- Employee development and recognition.

Because the concerns in one area of the organization can be different from those in another, effective surveys can be constructed to report on the subgroups that are of interest to management. Finally, some surveys can provide a picture of how engaged, partially engaged, and disengaged employees view different aspects of the workplace. This type of data allows management to prioritize its response to survey data, allowing for the best chance to retain the most loyal, productive employees.

For more detailed information or to learn more about MRA's Employee Opinion/Engagement surveys, contact Kristin Reed, Survey Manager, at (262) 696-3488 or kristinr@mranet.org.