



2020 GUIDE TO EMPLOYEE VOICE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE	
WHAT EMPLOYEE VOICE LOOKS LIKE AT THE START OF THE DECADE?	2
CHAPTER TWO	
Po-TAE-to/Po-tA-To	
WHAT'S UP WITH EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT vs. EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE?	4
CHAPTER THREE	
WHAT'S THE SCUTTLEBUTT AROUND ACTIVE LISTENING?	5
CHAPTER FOUR	
PICTURE THE PROCESS: HOW	7
Step 1	
ASK YOURSELF WHY?	7
• WHY DOES IT MATTER?	8
• WHY BORROW A PAGE FROM THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PLAYBOOK?	9
• WHEN IS IT BEST TO TUNE IN?	10
• WHO SHOULD STEP INTO THE DIALOGUE?	10
• WHAT ABOUT THE EXTENDED FAMILY? DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION	11
Step 2	
• WHAT STRATEGIC PLANNING INVOLVES?	12
Step 3	
• HOW PRE-SURVEY COMMUNICATION UPS THE ANTE?	13
Step 4	
• WHAT SUCCESSFUL DEPLOYMENT LOOKS LIKE?	14
• HOW THE BEST TOOLS OF THE TRADE MAKE IT EASIER?	15
Step 5	
• WHY GO BIG DATA OR GO HOME? PEOPLE ANALYTICS	15
• WHY THINK AND ACT LIKE A COMPUTER HACK?	16
Step 6	
• WHERE POST-DATA COMMUNICATION FITS?	16
• WHY FREQUENT COMMUNICATION IS A VITAL COMPONENT OF ACTIVE LISTENING?	17
Step 7	
• HOW TO MASTER THE ART OF ACTIVE LISTENING? ACTION PLANNING	18
• WHERE TECHNOLOGY STEPS IT UP A NOTCH?	18
• WHEN TO PUT A HUMAN STAMP ON ACTION PLANNING?	19
Step 8	
• WHERE ACTIVE LISTENING LEADS? CONTINUOUS LEARNING – WASH, RINSE, REPEAT	21
CONCLUSION	22
RESOURCES REFERENCES	23

“There is no such thing as a worthless conversation, provided you know what to listen for. And questions are the breath of life for a conversation.”

James Nathan Miller

Senior fellow, Harvard Kennedy School
Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

INTRODUCTION

We've seen a lot of change over the twenty-tens: motion-control gaming with virtual reality headgear, electric powered cars, and communication technologies that have completely revolutionized the way we interact with our world. Transformation has business in its grips too. Most of us can barely imagine where artificial intelligence and machine learning will lead, say nothing of an exploding gig economy and increasing numbers of people working remotely for organizations on the other side of the globe, the country, their states or towns. It's anyone's guess what will roar into our organizations in the decade of the twenty-twenties.

But checking in regularly with the people we see every day in our workplaces can certainly help chart a path. Some will be able to tell us about trends and technologies we should be watching. Others will have innovative ideas that can lead to new opportunities. Virtually all will have insights that can help us become better employers and stronger competitors in the fields where we play.

Never before has the Employee Voice been such a crucial tool in our toolbox of systems and strategies, policies and procedures.

Drawn from our experience guiding survey deployments for some of the largest Fortune 500 enterprises all the way through to grassroots charitable organizations, we've looked at millions of feedback comments through the lens of the Employee Experience. And we've evaluated how this data translates in places of work. What does it mean? Why is it important? What comes next?

This eBook is your definitive guide to planning, soliciting, analyzing and **ACTING** on the candid thoughts of employees in 2020. It covers the **Who, What, When, Where, Why** and **How** of Active Listening.

Are your leaders and managers inspiring everyone to reach their potential, to strive for their personal best? Where does your organization or division or department excel and why? Where does it fall short? What recommendations are out there for improvement?

An annual or biennial census Employee Engagement survey is your spring board, the jump off point into a deep well of insights. When something significant happens in your industry or a change-management initiative is in the works, or you simply want to know what your team is thinking you can have a multi-way dialogue in real-time to dive deeper. Frequent pulse surveys and an Active Listening model flush out details and provide in-the-moment insights that can catapult your agility into the competitive stratosphere.

So what are we waiting for? Let's get started.

WHAT EMPLOYEE VOICE LOOKS LIKE AT THE START OF THE DECADE?

Employee Voice is one of the most studied concepts in business literature. CIPD, the 100-year-old-professional body for HR and people development defines it as “the ability of employees to express their views, opinions, concerns and suggestions, and for these to influence decisions at work.”

The concept of people analytics has rocketed to the top of business agendas. This blast off was first fuelled by our supplier relationship management practices. Marked and measurable improvements ratcheted up our relational approach to customers and the best ways to manage prospects - and now, that relationship focus is sighted on employees.

What IS Employee Voice?

For starters it's not just about collecting data. It's about looking at the correlation between data and the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that matter most to your organization. We need these inputs to help us improve. It facilitates engagement and guides sound decision making.

Employee Voice is the means by which people communicate their views to their employer. It's the main way employees can influence matters that affect them at work. For employers, effective voice contributes toward innovation, productivity and organizational improvement. For employees, it often results in increased job satisfaction, greater influence and better opportunities for development.”

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 31 Jan 2019

To put things in context, human resource management was born in the 18th century when the earliest industrial revolution tycoons realized that factory workers made their manufacturing worlds go round. The HR discipline formalized as economic efficiency became the mantra of manufacturing. Come the 20th century HR's place was firmly entrenched under the strong arm of finance. It operated in fiscal years, quarter years, and planned accordingly.

In keeping with what worked to measure customer satisfaction, employee attitude surveys emerged sometime in the 1920s, morphing around 70 years later into engagement surveys. Conducted every year or two the focus shifted from measuring satisfaction to understanding levels of employee commitment.

“A paper published by the Institute of Employment Studies in 1990 From People to Profits, the HR link to the service-profit chain showed how employee attitudes and behavior could improve customer retention and consequently sales performance. Supported by extensive research the clear link between engagement and performance helped establish employee engagement’s importance to both HR and business performance.

Organizations began to see the potential that engagement had to positively affect a whole raft of HR and business measures including employee retention, absenteeism and turnover; sales; profitability and customer service/satisfaction scores.”

But nowadays change is moving at such a chaotic pace, and the competition to find and keep good talent is so scorching hot companies are saying, “We need to understand employee sentiment all year to better the experience.”

Thinking back on the origins of HR and those early days of Employee Voice, the initial purpose of worker surveys was to inform business decisions beneficial to the bottom line (it wasn’t really about people).

How times have changed.

Throughout 2020 a trend we can expect to see across all types and sizes of organizations is a considerable push towards humanness. After all personal lives aren’t checked with coats when people arrive for work, right?

Yet only 43% of US employees think their employers care about their work-life balance.

We can’t have relationships with the technology we use on the job. But we can have decent rapport with our leaders and peers. Healthy relationships in the workplace (where we trust and support one another), makes it easier to share observations that might otherwise be left unsaid. The ability to express these insights can serve as a basis for fostering human connection. And by regularly asking for feedback through the voice of employees we open the door to fresh perspectives that can strengthen our holistic relationships and competitive positions.

**Employee Voice is the
new business currency,
the agility factor**

**Employee Experience
is the modern business
mantra, the great leveler**

**Active Listening is the
way we reap dividends
from both.**

Po-TAE-to/Po-tA-To WHAT'S UP WITH EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT vs. EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE?

In HR we do a lot of rebranding. We take employment and call it recruiting. Then we take recruiting and label it talent acquisition. But that's not what's going on with Employee Engagement and Employee Experience. While they're not mutually exclusive, they're definitely linked, inextricably intertwined measurable Employee Voice concepts. They're complimentary but not the same.

Coined by Boston University professor William Kahn in 1990, Employee Engagement is the emotional attachment employees have to their organization. Highly engaged employees are, as HumanResourceToday.com describes, passionate about their work and committed to the vision and goals of the organization. They're innovative and provide new ideas and consistent performance to move the organization forward.

Engagement has become a key metric for understanding the health of an organization's culture. When employees are engaged, they're able to bring their full selves to work, are more productive, and more likely to stay with their organization.

According to Gallup in fall 2018, 34% of U.S. workers were "engaged" at work, while 53% remained "not engaged," with the rest somewhere in the middle. What's been missing is a more holistic Employee Experience – the kind of thinking needed to break open engagement floodgates.

"Employee Experience is sum of everything an Employee Experiences throughout their connection to the organization – every employee interaction, from the first contact as a potential recruit to the last interaction after the end of employment, including interactions that are usually the domain of facilities, corporate communications and IT."

Experience is something the employee is immersed in every day. When we make the experience of employees our focus, engagement inevitably follows. It moves us into a **PROACTIVE** mindset where we start to think about how we can create great Employee Experiences in our workplace as opposed to how we can measure our workplace to see how engaged we are and THEN go back to fix any broken parts.

"No one individual or department can own it by themselves; the organization as a whole has to design and create the experience. Communication and HR and IT play a role. Management and leadership play huge roles. Our fellow employees play a role."

Jason Lauritsen

Author and Employee Engagement Expert

Think of these two Employee Voice concepts – not as a measurement of either engagement OR experience.

Think of effective Employee Voice as a measurement of whatever it is you need to know based on your business strategy. That need could be something engagement specific (how collaboration technology impacts sentiment around teamwork and communication. It could be something experience oriented (how the introduction of team meetings and recognition – receiving accolades in front of peers – is being received by the workforce). Or it might be a combination of both (how social events impact employee perceptions of inclusion).

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT'S THE SCUTTLEBUTT AROUND ACTIVE LISTENING?

Active Listening reinforces the value of Employee Voice, feeds into the humanness of our organizations, and ultimately helps to point us in the right direction.

As the twenty-twenties unfold and many organizations are trending towards creating excellent workplace experiences, Active Listening is expected to be the singularly most important step in the process.

“Active Listening offers frequent insight into Employee Engagement, but also supports the ability to change questions, diagnose issues, as well as see the impact of actions real-time. The results are higher accountability for leadership to act: by ensuring employee sentiment is being measured more frequently and having a ‘moment-in-time’ view that may be influenced by specific internal/external factors. In addition to higher quality insights for leaders, the Employee Experience is dramatically improved. It’s a shift of redundant questions around measuring Employee Engagement to actively soliciting feedback to influence overall experience. Regardless of the cadence (some companies conduct these weekly, others quarterly), there’s flexibility in the number of questions that can be asked.”

Rob Catalano
Chief Engagement Officer, WorkTango

When we want employees to feel wholly engaged and understood, Active Listening establishes a baseline for employee survey results. It trends this information over a period of time. And then digs deeper by asking more specific questions based on actively listening to the results of previous surveys. It’s not about asking the same questions over and over. It’s about fluid questions that pay attention to employees’ responses, generate relevant insights, and **INSPIRE ACTION**. It’s about seeking collaborative input that guides strategies for internal changes or emerging industry challenges. It’s about acknowledging employees as full-fledged stakeholders and listening intently to what they have to say. It’s a holistic approach with the potential to create value – not only for your organization – but also for your people.

“Approach employees as true partners, involving them in continuous dialogues and processes about how to design and alter their roles, tasks and working relationships — which means that leaders need to make it safe enough for employees to speak openly of their experiences at work.”

William Kahn
Professor, Boston University

Active Listening comprises a growing body of tools and techniques:

- **In-depth annual surveys**
- **Town-hall sessions**
- **All-staff briefings**

...play a part in transaction-minded goals focused on sharing information to drive value for the organization.

- **Frequent continuous listening pulse surveys:**
- **Willingness of leaders to listen and genuinely take to heart the views of their teams**

...deliver both organizational and relational gains.

- **One-on-one continuous conversations between individuals and managers – based on a foundation of openness and social equality**
- **Conscientious efforts from leaders to show greater empathy with employees and to understand the impact of organizational decisions on individuals**
- **Formal employee-driven action planning that turns insights into actions**

...lead to the democratization of communication and serve as a stepping stone towards more inclusive decision-making and more multi-directional benefit

“It’s important to emphasize dialogue going in both directions, the idea of reciprocity. We expect employees to be loyal but we don’t always demonstrate loyalty back to them. In a healthy relationship it’s reciprocal. It goes both ways.”

Jason Lauritsen
Author and Employee Engagement Expert

Dame Carolyn McCall, for instance, exemplified Active Listening when she joined British discount airline group Easy Jet as CEO. It was at a time when the organization was facing serious difficulties and not delivering on its customer promise (Hollinger 2014). To identify the root of the problem, she spent time with front-line staff instead of relying on the version of reality portrayed by managers. Her approach built people’s trust in her as a leader, and immediately highlighted what needed to be done to solve the issue.

“Authentic dialogue enables individuals to acknowledge that they each are part of a greater whole, that they naturally resonate with others within this whole, and that the whole is, indeed, greater than the sum of its various parts. As participants in such a holistic process, together they can produce greater results than they would just as individuals without this meaningful connection.”

American Society for Public Administration, 2018

CHAPTER FOUR

PICTURE THE PROCESS: HOW

“An emerging view is that engagement needs to be characterized as transformational. Organizations should dedicate 90 percent of their engagement effort on ‘post-survey’ activity to inspire people to do great work and match their efforts with the organization’s goals. The other 10 percent is attributed to ‘transactional’ engagement – the often sterile process of capturing survey-based evidence to support the transformational program of engagement activities.”

Dr. Martin Reddington DBA, Academic Fellow CIPD

Step 1

ASK YOURSELF **WHY**

When you plan for action in your personal life (a vacation, for instance) you generally know what it is you want to achieve. Are you looking for a chillaxing beach destination, an invigorating city adventure, an exotic cultural jolt to the ol’ system? What is the outcome goal for getting away?

Giving rise to Employee Voice is no different. To quote the title of New York Times bestselling author Simon Sinek: **Start with Why.**

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH?



It could be just one initiative.

Perhaps your organization is going through some kind of change in response to intense market competition. Or you want to know the impact of a major technological transformation.

Maybe your organization wants to know more about Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI), or psychological health and safety concerns which are both common emerging measurement pieces these days.

Then again, it could be a full-on, enterprise-wide measurement of engagement. That long-term baseline measurement is important. It serves as your springboard to thematic active-conversation pulse surveys. Typically, organizations will pick two or three high action items that have come out of the engagement survey and have the greatest potential impact. Then it's time to shift to active conversation for more input – digging deeper into a high impact/low score area like senior

leadership.

Here's an example:

Let's say your onboarding pulse surveys show new hires don't feel connected or understand leadership vision, and your most recent full-populace engagement survey suggest the same kind of sentiment. By actively listening and connecting the dots, an outcome action could be onboarding luncheons with someone from the C-suite, to break down some of those perceptions. Follow up pulse surveys let you continue the conversation to discern if the action is doing what was intended.

The best Employee Voice initiatives are:

- **Developed as a strategy with a clear purpose**
- **Intentionally designed to help deliver the organization's purpose and goals**
- **Meant to bring clarity and understanding around the Employee Experience within your organization and ultimately lead to improvements**
- **Conduits to employees buy-in that inspires acceptance rather than resistance, and surface technologies, ideas, opportunities and approaches that can get your organization in front of change**
- **Multi-faceted and integrated**

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

“The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when one asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer.”

Henry David Thoreau

19th century American essayist, poet, and philosopher

Creating opportunities for workers to have a say about issues that impact them makes them feel valued as legitimate stakeholders. In turn, people who feel valued are more likely to stay in the organization.

Sharing views on how work should be carried out also lets people put their skills and knowledge to work. Their views lead to higher productivity, greater innovation and problem-solving solutions that enable a culture of trust and empowerment.

Trust is your imperative. It nourishes and builds employee-employer relationships, yearly, weekly, daily. Relationships build opportunities. And opportunities build personal and business successes.

Agility is another important reason WHY.

What we're talking about is the need for your organization to be able to quickly identify and effectively respond to external and internal challenges. Doing that most successfully demands employee trust. People don't fear change; they fear poorly managed change, and especially change they don't trust. Cultivating trust is much more likely when you are continuously listening to your workforce and activating Employee Voice.

WHY BORROW A PAGE FROM THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PLAYBOOK?

Studies have found that real-time feedback from customer analytics helped 58% of enterprises significantly increase customer retention and loyalty.

Your most loyal customers are the ones who feel supported, the ones who trust you and enjoy working with you. That's why more organizations are leveraging similar tools and solutions to drive Employee Experience and Engagement. When you whittle it all down employees are the key to the quality of your products, your services and successful customer relations.

“Always treat your employees exactly as you want them to treat your best customers.”

Stephen R. Covey

Educator, Author, and Businessman

Use customer experience as a tactical way to explain WHY Employee Voice is vital to your organization's overarching business strategy. Customer experience design is something your executive team has been reading and thinking and knowing about for a while. It resonates. Talk about WHY we spend so much time thinking about how we want customers to feel or the experience we want them to have, and then connect how the same dynamics are at play with the Employee Experience.

WHEN IS IT BEST TO TUNE IN?

There's a whole educational piece needed when talking with your leadership, operational and direct manager teams. Surprisingly, or not, a lot of people think employee measurement is still about job satisfaction (yes, you read that right). But we know it's so much more. The effectiveness of our Employee Voice initiatives and the insights people analytics reveal hinge on understanding this.

“The increased use of real-time analytics and recommendation engines in both consumer and business technologies has raised concern that feedback gathered from traditional engagement surveys every two years (or even yearly) is not frequent enough to provide a complete and current perspective,”

Gartner

Full-populace engagement surveys together with frequent measurement surveys allow your organization to transition to active-conversation.

WHEN it comes to timing, many people have questions about the concept of frequency.

What is best practice for frequency?

It really depends on your culture, level of trust and the expectations of your people.

Show them you care – deliver that message, build trust, and response rates will go up.

There's no such thing as survey fatigue. As long as you're demonstrating ACTION then that frequency can increase. It's a reciprocal cycle of asking, receiving, acting on feedback....asking, receiving, acting on feedback...

Frequent pulse surveys ensure your organization is constantly getting fresh perspectives which are essential to everything from innovation to DEI.

WHO SHOULD STEP INTO THE DIALOGUE?

Employees, managers and leaders are all participants of the Employee Voice process.

At the same time research is showing emotional intelligence is a necessary characteristic for leaders and managers. Findings from CIPD indicate a widely-held desire for those at the helm to show greater empathy with employees, to understand the impact of organizational decisions on individuals, and to enable more inclusive decision-making.

WHAT ABOUT EXTENDED FAMILY? DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

When there's the whole matter of DEI. With increasing workforce diversity driven by factors including a multi-generational workforce and more non-traditional employment arrangements the "WHO" extends to these diverse groups from across your organization.

Over the next decade, more organizations will shift toward a fluid workforce model. The "WHO" in our continuous conversations needs to include these contingent workers – using tools and opportunities for these folks to share their views.

Accessibility, usability and inclusion are part of the conversation too. People with sight, hearing, mobility or other challenges factor into the DEI equation. They need tools designed into your Employee Voice initiatives so they can contribute equally without barriers.

And of course issues change over time. From the newest member of your teams to the strategically-driven leader, employee motivations and priorities change over tenure.

Collecting, tracking and analyzing data every stage in the employee life cycle and inviting commentary about interactions with the company along the way, both good and not so great, provide the kinds of insights you need to fine tune and finesse the Employee Experience.

Employee Voice needs to be representative of views across all levels, tenures, generations, working arrangements, departments and geographies.

Roughly 67% of job seekers evaluate a company's diversity practices before accepting a job offer. According to Glassdoor 72% of employees say they would leave their company for a more diverse organization. While Deloitte reports 56% of international business leaders surveyed by Forbes "strongly agreed" that diversity improved innovation in their companies.



Today Staffing Industry Analysts pegs the size of the U.S. contingent workforce at 53 million workers out of almost 160 million workers according to BLS.

Step 2

WHAT STRATEGIC PLANNING INVOLVES?

What your strategic approach entails depends on how to best capture the Employee Voice. In terms of a planning structure, the best approaches support:

- Consistent questions on a frequent cadence to gauge and measure employee sentiment over time
- Rotating questions that dive into more specific issues or gaps over time after measuring the sentiment baseline from key questions tied to main engagement drivers
- Specific questions relevant to the business to get real-time insight and feedback about what's happening in the company today (or going to happen) such as reactions to major announcements or large organizational changes.
- Using additional open-ended questions to capture exactly what issues are at the forefront of employees' minds

A typical Voice strategy might include:

- Targeted candidate, new hire, promotion, and retiree/exit surveys for insight at key moments of the employee lifecycle
- Enterprise-wide surveys to track Employee Engagement in depth
- Pulse surveys for quick feedback on progress and hot topics issued full-scale or specifically targeted
- Employee Voice committees or listening groups
- Regularly scheduled one-on-one conversations between the employee and their direct manager
- Focus groups to give qualitative feedback on important issues
- Online polls for quick responses
- Ideation workshops to explore ideas and suggestions in further detail
- Stand up Q&As with leaders
- Leadership lunch and learn sessions
- Team meetings for more operational feedback and discussion

Once the strategic aims (the WHYs behind Employee Voice) are clear then planning can fall into place. Spell out the strategic purpose of your initiative and always refer back to it when making decisions related to the Employee Voice.

Is this a full-out, organization wide initiative to measure Employee Engagement sentiment? Or are you looking for real-time employee insights – feedback that can have a bearing on business areas that matter most at a given point in time?

Who is your intended audience? Determine if there is any computer literacy or language, disability or other barriers to take into consideration. Are screen readers or other tools needed for people with visual or audio or mobility impairment? Develop your model with these considerations in mind.

Consider factors such as location logistics (production workers, sales and field staff, health care providers, teachers, and contingent workers aren't working in front of a laptop with easy access to an online survey).

Give careful thought to the questions asked. In a utility company, for instance, it doesn't make sense to ask an office-related, attitude-based question when the majority of employees are in the field. Design your questions and formats such that:

based on role A you get asked question X
based on role B you get asked question Y

Design for mobile device formats (everyone has a cell phone or tablet these days and younger gen workers prefer this tool over others).

Consider setting up kiosks in manufacturing environments, or establishing laptop stations in common areas.

Step 3

HOW PRE-SURVEY COMMUNICATION UPS THE ANTE?

Communication is an imperative before launching any kind of Employee Voice questionnaire.

Thoughtful pre-communication:

- Clarifies the purpose (WHY)
- Emphasizes the value of everyone's opinion (WHO)
- Secures buy-in across ALL levels,
- Assures the survey is a safe platform for everyone to express themselves with candor
- Generates higher participation rates - which means more data for better analysis

The ideal time to start talking loudly about a major census survey is six weeks in advance hold pre-survey management sessions to get everyone on board, beginning with your executive team. If you encounter resistance, customized workshops can help secure buy-in and commitment.

Three weeks before deploying a full-on employee survey your internal communication should be in full-force. Pulse surveys require far less of a communication push, but clarity of purpose, the value of every opinion and confidentiality assurances are just as important.

Select the best communication vehicles for your audience and establish a budget for expenses like:

Translation services
Poster design and printing
SMS/text message blasts
Video conferencing
Town hall gatherings
Incentives and giveaways

Post promotional material one to two weeks before your survey launch.

Step 4

WHAT SUCCESSFUL DEPLOYMENT LOOKS LIKE?

With any employee survey, your objective should be to get the highest response right off the top. A good response rate after day one is 20-30%. After a week your rates should be at least 50%.

We've all heard the real estate mantra: location-location-location. When it comes to investing in Employee Voice think: timing-timing-timing.

Some tips to keep in your back pocket:

- Forget about dropping a survey just before collective bargaining starts or shortly after negotiations have been ratified. Moods and outcomes can skew results.
- Steer clear of busy times like fiscal year ends or budget planning periods. The same goes for civic or religious holidays, long-weekends and popular vacation months. People are distracted, just about to leave, away, or just returning. Response rates can take a hit.
- Avoid Mondays when people are planning their day and the week ahead. Surveys deployed on Mondays tend to get deferred.
- Fridays are another non-starter. A lot of people wrap up early or take the day off (you've probably done this a few times yourself).
- Plan on keeping a full-blown engagement survey open for two weeks (three if you're using kiosks). Pulse and attitude surveys are a handful of days. In either situation be loud and clear about the deadline date in your communications.

Remember production staff, field workers and others who aren't sitting in front of a computer for a good chunk of their workday. Set up computer stations in lunchrooms or other high-traffic common areas. Make all surveys mobile-format-friendly for the benefit of your remote and contingent workforce.

HOW THE BEST TOOLS OF THE TRADE MAKE IT EASIER?

Starr Conspiracy has spent the better part of the past 10 years helping industries identify broader trends in the workplace and the impact on technology. Here's an excerpt from its Brandscape 2020 series about Engagement and Employee Voice:

“For engagement measurement players the need to extend the functionality into the performance space is clear – if an engagement issue is identified it needs to be addressed. For performance players the inherent need to measure engagement – both long-term with annual engagement surveys and in real-time with pulse surveys is a natural fit with the product stack. An interesting application is combining employee sentiment data, feedback and goals in Employee Voice products such as WorkTango.”

The WorkTango employee census survey methodology focuses on helping companies gain insight on Employee Engagement and factors that create workplace experiences where employees can succeed.

Engagement factors are the key elements of the workplace that support building an environment of engaged employees. They enable organizations to understand what influences Employee Engagement and diagnose potential causes of disengagement. The model also asks additional questions that help measure whether employees feel that something will change as a result of these surveys.

Step 5

WHY GO BIG DATA OR GO HOME? PEOPLE ANALYTICS

Analysis really depends on the measuring piece of course: multiple independent variable analysis - or driver analysis (not the poor scores, but what actually impacts culture), takes multiple various factors, and compares them with dependent variables – such as Employee Engagement or the questions that are associated with cognitive and emotional connection such as pride or employee retention.

A lot of people aren't doing this which affects what they should prioritize and use in their action plans. We're all bracing for the decade ahead to be competitively grueling for market and talent share. And we're all talking about how agility can cut through the clutter.

People analytics allows your organization to become more action agile. An annual or biennial Engagement survey followed by Employee Voice questions around specific drivers drives this agility. If something's not working your people will wave the red flag so you can make changes. Look for tools and vendors, like **WorkTango**, that offer sophisticated analysis within their platform, analytics that highlight insights people can actually understand by giving strengths, weaknesses and challenges they're facing in their departments.

WHY THINK AND ACT LIKE A COMPUTER HACK?

Computer hackers go into a string of code and manipulate that code to try to make the whole program do something different. It's about identifying small changes they can make to have a fairly sizeable impact on the outcome of whatever the process is. Engagement hacking is about taking a bigger problem and breaking it into smaller pieces to find something you can take action on now.

Keynote speaker, author, Employee Engagement expert and workplace culture consultant **Jason Lauritsen** gives this example:

Say a team trust issue surfaces in your organization. What hacking does is take that problem and start breaking it down to identify all the different things that could be going on, or all the different components that lead to team trust. It could be expectations, the manager's behavior, the people on the team, the way the team meets. Then identify one thing to start experimenting with, make changes, take some action, try it and see what happens. If nothing changes throw it out and try something else.

In 2020 and the years beyond expect to see more marketplace advances featuring the addition of an **ACTION** piece in platforms that details what steps different managers should take based on feedback from their teams.

Giving managers real-time access to data feeds their role as Employee Experience champions and turns Employee Voice from an HR exclusive domain to a company-wide initiative.

Step 6

WHERE POST-DATA COMMUNICATION FITS?

When a feedback exercise is concluded, everyone wants to know about the findings and what actions will come from the collective Voice. Communicating this information is where Active Listening comes to the fore. It's a critical piece of the experience and engagement puzzle.

Only 17% of employees strongly agree there's open communication throughout all levels of their company

Thoughtful post-data communication:

Involves everyone in the process

- reiterates the purpose
- restates the value of everybody's opinions and insights

Validates the importance of employee feedback

- acknowledges what is being done well and where improvements can be made
- conveys next-steps based on findings

Creates a sense of belonging

- underscores the magnitude of Employee Voice through demonstrated progress
- sets the stage for ongoing two-way dialogue (Active Listening) - which ultimately leads to better business outcomes, better workplace culture and better Employee Experience

As mentioned earlier, platforms like WorkTango's give employees access in real-time to a high-level snapshot report, and managers access to their team reports. However, access to this data as well as all other key insight reports is based entirely on what your organization decides, and is customized accordingly.

An organization's willingness to give managers access to their employee feedback is a forward-thinking approach that encourages dialogue between managers and employees. This is a significant consideration given that in a recent poll of professional workers in the U.S. and Canada, a whopping 64% of the 675 workers polled, agreed that "leaders making decisions without seeking input" was their biggest problem.

Technology is addressing this even further by imbedding a communications tool into the Active Listening platform that lets managers express concern and request more clarity around a respondent's comments (while still protecting the individual's anonymity).

This kind of communication tool is the beginning of a framework for **employee** voice that enables workers and employers to fully benefit from sharing of expertise, ideas, and opinions in the context of modern working practices.

WHY FREQUENT COMMUNICATION IS A VITAL COMPONENT OF ACTIVE LISTENING?

When results are in, follow up (and where possible face to face) communication is essential to assure employees their voices have been heard.

Response rates are a strong indication of where your organization sits on the Active Listening scale.

If concerns are plentiful employees will speak up.

This is especially true when issues impact the ability to develop and progress and realize full potential.

Active silence can be equally or more important than speaking out.

Employees can be silent for several reasons:

- **a perceived lack of need for Voice because there's already a shared understanding between individuals or groups**
- **silence is imposed or dissuaded by overbearing managers – signifying a lack of power and fear of repercussion dissent is expressed**
- **a simple lack of opinion**
- **a belief that they won't be listened to – which is a clear symptom of an organization that asks for feedback without follow up action**

Tools that maximize the power of continuous communication and feedback have the greatest potential for helping you improve engagement and retention, build an intentional culture, optimize internal transformations and enhance organizational resilience, and drive operational excellence.

To paraphrase Josh Bersin

**“There’s no way to hear and act on
Employee Voice without employees
being involved.”**

Step 7

HOW TO MASTER THE ACT OF ACTIVE LISTENING? ACTION PLANNING

A survey itself isn’t enough to serve as the Employee Voice. It needs a champion - people who can take those results and bring them to life through storytelling. Shared real-time insights are the epilogue of your story.

Chapter one launches into more details with people analytics. The balance of your story unfolds through the eyes of your executive team, and the behavior and operational actions that cascades across and throughout the organization.

A multi-pronged approach to the ACT of Active Listening works best. Certain drivers of engagement such as senior leadership, company outlook lend themselves to formal action planning and enterprise-wide programs. But you also have bottom up work/life balance and direct management, teamwork and collaboration drivers that are much more micro level. That’s where managers and smaller groups of employees must have the leeway to create their own action plans, their own solutions, to establish bonds of trust.

WHERE TECHNOLOGY STEPS IT UP A NOTCH?

As growing numbers of people use their own places as work spaces, technology is a fantastic enabler for our remote and contingency workforce. But let’s not forget, the fundamental art of Active Listening is communication.

Technology can be as effective as in-person interaction as long as it fosters the human connection. With technology we can have action planning discussions from virtually anywhere. Technology helps the process. It provides a wealth of background materials and tools we can use. It’s all online. It’s collaborative. Some might argue that the technology tsunami is beginning to substitute human connection, which may seem counter intuitive to Employee Experience, inspiration and engagement. But many proactive organizations are leveraging a platform such as WorkTango to automatically nudge actions.

This technology identifies areas of concern, provides step-by-step recommendations and outlines action timelines which enable leaders to be able to ACT in a visibly responsive (Active Listening) fashion, quickly and consistently.

The role of AI fits nicely into this action piece. How so?

Let's say your system recommends an action someone can take. Machine learning collects feedback from your leaders and managers indicating what worked (and what didn't).

In turn their feedback helps the system to recalibrate and create ever better recommendations. This is not a one-size fits all. It's a finely fitted, tuck 'n pinch approach, tailored to suit specific circumstances.

For instance, managers who receive feedback that point to a need for more open communication could receive a recommendation for one-on-one meetings, with information about **WHY** do it, **WHAT** outcomes one-on-ones can lead to and a step-by-step approach that makes it easy to work through.

What's new in making this successful and organization-wide driven is that you can see what works. You can compare feedback fine-tune accordingly, measure, and track again. It brings a whole different meaning to the notion of "change" management, doesn't it?

WHEN TO PUT A HUMAN STAMP ON ACTION PLANNING?

A full-populace Employee Engagement survey is something of "a horse of a different color." The development of Employee Voice Action Plans comes from your people analytics. But there's a lot of data to digest. And employees need to have a say.

This is where post-survey consulting support brings the added human connection piece and provides that story telling around data interpretation and analysis.

Suppose data reveals that new employees are leaving your organization after two years and they're leaving due to a lack of career growth. What are you going to do about that?

Employees should be driving the solutions and the ideas that come up. However those solutions need to fit into corporate plans.

Facilitated workshops bring together employees to explore key engagement factors, like career growth. Because it is Employee Voice, representation is intentionally designed for a good mix of employees by levels, departments, tenure, age, and so on.

WHY?

Because diversity of thought and opinion is paramount. If you have only programmers, for example, they tend to think alike and have the same experience of the company. Similarly the experiences and challenges that people working from a downtown utility office have are different from people in the field working on power lines. That's why a mix is important.

Your organizational narrative such as vision, mission and values, acts as an 'inner voice' guiding people on how to behave and where to aim, on behalf of the organization.

REMEMBER

It's not about hierarchy or who's the boss. Once you get 20 to 50 people in the room it's truly an egalitarian experience. A VP can participate but their opinion is no more or less important than any other. Leave titles at the door.

A big part of Action Planning is the human interaction, getting people to talk, to feel comfortable, to free their minds. The discussions that happen, with people challenging ideas, is a very important dynamic. A neutral or objective third party creates a safe place where people readily share opinions and thoughts.

A typical ideation session generates **100+ ideas**. Through a democratic prioritization exercise those numbers are distilled down to a handful of ideas, which are then evaluated more deeply. You get prioritized ideas, evaluation of those ideas and action plans. Firm outputs.

While all of this is inclusive, employee driven, and promotes diversity of thought, organizational action plans still need to be aligned with direction from the top. Let's go back to the career growth example. If the corporate directive is to develop a forward looking career path document to help employees figure out how to progress, that approach should apply consistently across the organization.

You can still empower your managers to develop their own plans, but at least they have an anchor, a corporate direction rather than creating something in contrast or contradiction. At the department level you can put in specific metrics – but they're still aligned. Managers can focus on teamwork and bring in employees to help build out those metrics around the corporate strategy.

The Active Listening piece – the continuous conversation – is to dive deep and deeper by asking employees:
“HOW DO YOU LIKE WHAT'S CHANGED? WHAT COULD WE DO BETTER?”

Step 8

WHERE ACTIVE LISTENING LEADS? CONTINUOUS LEARNING – WASH, RINSE, REPEAT

Continuous Active Listening leads to continuous learning.

Continuous learning leads to continuous action.

Continuous action leads to continuous improvement.

Continuous improvement leads to continuous conversation - checking in, asking more questions.

And then it's back to repeating the cycle all over again.

“When you listen, it’s amazing what you can learn. When you act on what you’ve learned, it’s amazing what you can change.”

Audrey Mclaughlin, Canadian Politician

CONCLUSION

Lawyer, academic, and 28th President of the U.S. Woodrow Wilson is credited with saying that the ear of the leader must ring with the voices of the people.

True that.

But the rallying cry of today's research scientists, business thought leaders, company leaders who excel, and the organizations they lead is that the best tool for transformation – especially during this time of unprecedented change – is to actively listen to the voice of the people. To tune in with sincerity and intention.

Do your surveys. Identify areas for improvement. Run a workshop. Generate actionable ideas. Act and re-measure; always with Employee Voice ringing in your ears.

Organizations that do this properly are seeing positive improvement in the metrics around the areas where actions were measured. Employees see it, appreciate it, have a positive Employee Experience and ultimately become more engaged.

To quote Alice Duer Miller, a writer and feminist who, herself, influenced dramatic change:

Listening is not merely not talking, though even that is beyond most of our powers; it means taking a vigorous, human interest in what is being told to us.

Alice Duer

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WorkTango enables companies to give their employees a voice and easily collect feedback for any purpose. Using data science and natural language understanding, actionable insights from employee feedback is served in real-time to HR, executives, and people leaders. The results are quicker insight and action, better people decisions, and a more aligned and engaged workforce.

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