



Employee Engagement Pulse Survey

Special Report

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Introduction

Most of us are used to hearing the word "pulse" and immediately associating it with the functions of the heart. Pulse typically describes a measurement of the heart's health. However, a business organization's pulse is defined much differently. An organization's pulse has more to do with assessing the morale of a staff, the health of the organizational culture and the overall emotional climate.

Organizations have often leaned on surveys in order to gain information for informed business decisions. Employee, supplier and customer surveys help organizations to make more informed decisions about issues that can affect the long term health of a company. Hopefully, the information can be used to make pivotal changes that allow a business to prosper further. Some surveys focus on specific matters, while others are done on a more general basis.

With the advent of web based technology, there is one particular type of survey that has become more prevalent. The Pulse or Spot survey has risen in popularity and are considered to be one of the most helpful measurements of employee health for a business organization. These surveys train their focus on a small, influential group of employees and/or a small amount of questions.

Pulse surveys are able to provide statistics that measure the latest employee trends. They also enable the cost effective pursuit of continuous updates about organizational health over the course of time, by reducing the costs that are associated with a wider survey that is conducted on a larger scale.

The objective of this article is to give business leaders the help that they need in deciding whether the time is right to use a pulse survey to learn more about the health of their organization. A pulse survey does not need to replace a larger scale survey, but when used alongside each other, the pulse survey and the large scale survey are a great way to monitor the organization's health over a long period of time.

Types of Pulse Surveys

When it's time to make the determination about whether a pulse survey can help your business, the following factors must be taken under consideration. First of all, a pulse survey should not replace your regular ongoing survey process. If you already have an annual or biannual survey system in place, a pulse survey should not be used instead, it should be used in conjunction.

Snapshot

A snapshot pulse survey allows an organization to take the pulse of the business at a particular time and place. It allows them to select a certain part of their employee population and learn more about their thoughts and opinions. An organization can use a specific lens through which to view trends and similarities between different groups. If a business needs a quick decision making aid, a snapshot survey provides the necessary aid.

Follow Up Surveys

Pulse surveys are commonly used to follow up an employer's regular survey process. The vast majority of business organizations will conduct an employee survey once a year or once every two years. A follow up survey gives them the opportunity to collect additional information about specific actions in the initial survey. It also helps leaders determine whether their employees are making the proper progress on their action plans. Follow up surveys function as an interim check for leaders, so that they can make the appropriate changes to their action plans and ensure that they reach their desired business outcomes. Rather than waiting for a year or even two to check in on improvements, a follow up survey delivers immediate answers. Most follow up surveys are focused on action planning processes. The questions typically have to do with participation and areas that can be improved upon.

Performance Indicators

The majority of business organizations set up certain goals and targets that must be met in order to judge performance. For example, one such organization will use a subset of questions and an index score to measure their employees' level of engagement. This score is then monitored over the course of time and has an impact on employee bonuses and executive decision making.

Performance indicator pulse surveys are administered in between regular employee survey cycles in order to track their movement on the overall performance indication scale. From there, organizational leaders are able to make the necessary changes needed to positively impact final scores. There is another organization that tracks employee performance by using a metric that is quite similar to Six Sigma. They use a performance indicator pulse survey as a part of their normal evaluation process so that their records remain up to date. These surveys provide one easy to use metric for the work group's score card.

Topic or Audience Specific

These surveys focus on very specific questions, specific topics and specific audiences that an employer needs more information about. An organization's marketing department may wish to collect more information about a new product roll out, asking customers specific questions about their overall level of satisfaction. The quality control department may wish to find out if the staff has an adequate understanding of newly implemented processes. In these instances, both the audience of the survey and the content of the survey are focused on specific points of emphasis.

Sample Survey

Sample pulse surveys can include a wide range of questions that have been taken from a larger survey. It could be a full survey that is given to all customers and employers or it could be administered to a smaller group. Sample pulse surveys are given with the intention of learning more about a certain group of people or a certain set of items.

There is one organization that conducts a survey of all their employees every two years. During the year that surveys are not conducted, the organization administers a sample survey, with the objective of collecting important information about key areas of engagement. The survey is administered over the Internet and provides early indications about the following year's survey results. This allows organizations to tweak their action plans accordingly.

Timing/Frequency

As humans, we tend to check our pulses regularly. Checking your pulse is one of the reasons that you visit a doctor, so that they can advise you on any changes that you need to make in your life. They also check other health related areas to make sure that you are functioning on all cylinders. The frequency of a pulse survey is directly tied to the amount of information that needs to be gathered and what the organization hopes to accomplish. Frequency is typically driven by an organization's urgency to collect information and put it to use.

Following a Company Wide Survey	During an "Off" Year	After the Implementation of an Action Plan
<p>Most company surveys are conducted on a yearly basis or a biannual basis. After the results have been collected and the action plans have been altered accordingly, organizational leaders will want to know if their action planning efforts have made any sort of discernible difference before the next period of survey administration. Pulse surveys that are geared towards this purpose can be administered anywhere from six to twelve months after the implementing of an action plan. This gives a leader the time they need to accurately assess any changes or improvements that they have made to company policies.</p>	<p>As mentioned earlier, most company surveys are administered to employees on a more periodic basis, as opposed to every single year. By conducting surveys during the off year, employers are able to track any and all efforts to improve. Additionally, these surveys also enable organizations to collect early results and decide whether their next survey results will experience an improvement or a decline. Checking the pulse during an off year lets organizations know if their pulse is strong or erratic. Any standard survey questions can be administered to the entire staff or a smaller sample size. Each of these methods give employers a mid cycle evaluation on the movement of survey results.</p>	<p>An organization's survey planning tends to follow a certain structure. The cycle goes as follows: the development of a survey, the collection of data, analysis of results, the production and distribution of reports, the interpretation of data and the implementation of action plans. Most organizations work through this entire process. Even with the most well intentioned action planning processes, an organization does not always succeed in implementing changes, for a plethora of different reasons.</p> <p>One of these reasons is because of the lack of formal measuring tools to properly track improvement and performance. On the very rare occasion that an employer asks their employees how they are doing, it is typically time for the next annual survey. Pulse surveys that are administered after the implementing of an action plan are more able to measure the effectiveness of an organizational effort. Based on the results, an employer can either continue to push forward or make the necessary adjustments to improve.</p>

Types of Questions That Must Be Asked

Any questions that are included in a pulse survey should be geared towards whatever reasons you have for conducting the survey in the first place. A company should ask itself what it wants to know.

If an employer needs additional information that they were not able to receive from an initial survey, follow up questions may be needed to gain important clarification. Feedback sessions can also uncover the need for follow up questions. Questions are included in the survey that are aimed towards measuring the level of employee involvement in action planning. Employee involvement is a crucial aspect of any improvement to quality, so leaders will want to ensure that employees remain involved at all times. An organization could decide to administer a pulse survey after focus groups uncover additional challenges that the first survey did not. Follow up questions are then used to address these issues so that the appropriate steps can be taken to fix them.

Clarification/Follow Up Questions

Key Driving Questions

Key driver analysis takes place using statistical techniques after larger surveys of an entire organization. Key driver analysis determines the focus of an action plan and accounts for a huge percentage of variance in scores. Without key driver questions, it is much more difficult for an organization to understand the effectiveness of their improvement efforts.

Improvement to the scores on key driver questions means greater overall improvement the next time a companywide survey is administered. Key driver questions also help define the areas of focus and improve on action plans. Pulse surveys that utilize key driver questions either display decline or improvement in a way that is easy to understand. Since the key driver survey is more limited, an organization will not be able to tell if there has been improvement or decline until the next whole survey.

The questions in a pulse survey can be focused on the bottom three scoring questions or they can pinpoint their focus on certain target areas that are identified as items of action. One organization in particular conducts pulse surveys of their five lowest scoring questions, which also happen to be areas of focus for their action plans. This survey was administered during each quarter of the year in between the administering of the full survey. The employee scores experienced great improvement during this time period and supports the theory that the areas in which you spend your focus on are bound to improve.

Up until now, pulse surveys have been described in quantitative terms. However, a pulse survey can be more open ended, allowing an organization to gain more feedback. Open ended questions enable an organization to receive clarification, consumer feedback and more information from employees about focus areas. These surveys allow a manager to focus on certain recurring themes and to select dimensions and topics that they have particular interest in.

Bottom Three Questions

Results And Reporting

High Level Results

There are a variety of different ways that a pulse survey's results can be reported. If the survey was only administered to a smaller employee sample with the objective of assessing the effectiveness of an action plan, then only a small number of high level reports are needed to gauge the impact of these action plans.

However, if the pulse survey was administered to a wider range of employees who are spread out across the country and work for different departments, then reports for each and every region that was surveyed are needed so that managers can make informed decisions about how to run the business. Fewer report cuts are typically needed for pulse surveys, due to the small number of questions asked and limited amount of people included in the sample.

Fewer Demographic Cuts

Most pulse surveys do not include questions related to a specific demographic. Only employers that are collecting specific demographic data directly will find it easy to ask demographic questions. Most organizations believe in a simple rule of thumb: do not ask more demographic questions than open ended or close ended ones.

Should you need to ask demographic questions, then be sure to investigate the demographic cuts that will provide you with the most information. For an example, an employer may want to know about the effectiveness of a management training program. In this instance, the company will want to hear from a management based demographic.

Pulse Survey Trends

As online based technology becomes more widespread, a pulse survey is becoming one of the most commonly used tools to collect information. Pulse surveys help a business to make informed decisions and keep their action plans moving according to schedule. After the implementing of decisions, a pulse survey can help an organization to regroup. Pulse surveys are not only able to reach specific employee groups at specific points in time, but they are also designed as a fiscally responsible way to collect important information during times when budgets are at their tightest.