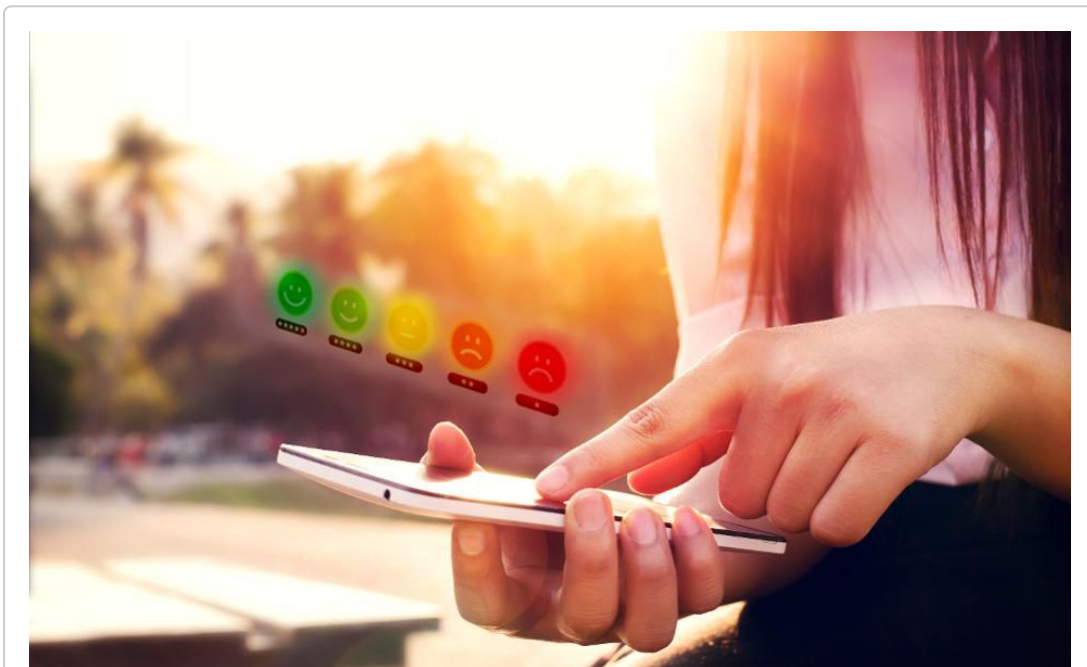


Employee Feedback Is Good For Employee Engagement; Action Is Better

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Collecting employee feedback is no longer enough. If companies want to optimize employee engagement, they must use that feedback and take action on it. Why and how to act on employee feedback was the key point at Culture Amp's Culture First conference.* It's not surprising that Culture Amp, a company that makes a leading employee feedback software platform, would focus its annual conference on employee feedback. But what companies should *do* with the feedback was the priority at the event and for customers in general.



Collecting employee feedback is not enough for robust, effective employee engagement.

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New Requirements for Employee Engagement

When employee engagement was a new phenomenon, it might have been enough for companies simply to gather information from and about employees. Simply knowing and tracking employee engagement was an important starting point for understanding the state of affairs and generating insights about the workforce. But knowledge is only as valuable as what it is used for. And more knowledge (what many companies are focused on) doesn't necessarily translate into better outcomes (what all companies need.)

In a presentation at Culture First about employee performance data, Stacia Garr, cofounder and principal analyst at RedThread Research, observed that companies have realized that it's no longer enough for companies to collect employee data for the sake of assessment alone. The data, she explained, must be used to make improvements--with employees, the workforce at large and the company overall.

Generating attention on employee feedback is also no longer enough. Speaking about the results he achieved with the Black Lives Matter movement and other activist work, DeRay McKesson cautioned against mistaking talk with impact. He advised, "Never confuse a change in conversation with a change in outcome." This is particularly relevant to the topic of employee feedback, as business leaders often only give lip service to employee engagement. It's easier to talk about learning from employees than it is to act on the learning.

What's more, many companies are working on improving the collection of employee insights by trying to increase survey participation rates and produce better reports. But this focus is misplaced. In his presentation, Josh Bersin, industry analyst and founder of Bersin by Deloitte, reported that these days most companies are good at getting employee feedback data and making sense of it. In fact, feedback has become so commonplace that he observed it has become "a commodity." "It's time," he declared, "to move from feedback to action."

Translating Feedback Into Action

Getting to the next level of employee engagement involves translating employee feedback into action.

The design of employee feedback collection is critical to ensure it leads to action. In discussing the role of feedback during mergers, demergers and acquisitions, Josh Berman, Culture Amp's Culture Enablement Lead, described how his organization designed its feedback mechanisms to be proactive during its acquisition of Zugata, a mobile performance management solution. The company fielded its standing quarterly feedback survey, along with targeted surveys and "Ask Me Anything" anonymous surveys, to anticipate questions and issues that might have arisen during the transition. Based on learnings from the feedback, organization leaders were able to pinpoint where a lack of confidence in the acquisition existed and use that knowledge to target communications and actions to address it. It also used the learnings from one survey to design the next. Berman talked about "using employee feedback as your GPS," relying on it to make ongoing course corrections. The timing, frequency and variety of inputs can transform employee feedback from a report for looking back to a tool for moving forward.

Developing and deploying an integrated system around employee feedback also sets it up for inspiring action. Bersin recommended integrating employee feedback with all other employee experience and data initiatives—from setting objectives and key results to one-on-ones between managers and employees, performance and compensation reviews, and development plans—into an “enterprise feedback architecture.” Then, by applying AI and automation to the data, companies could create an “intelligent platform” that serves up nudges and specific actions that employees and managers could use to improve their own and their team’s performance. By giving access to the platform directly to employees and managers, companies would empower those who need it the most and are in the best position to do something with it.

Melissa Paris, Senior People Scientist at Culture Amp, explained that feedback should also be approached as a two-way conversation. Company leaders should use feedback to engage in regular two-way conversations with employees about what to expect and what is expected of them, particularly during times of change. Paris described the “psychological contract” that exists between an employer and an employee and explained that it entails each party’s beliefs about the mutual obligations that exist between them—e.g., employer gives employee pay and benefits and employee gives employer time and work output; employer provides employee a safe, positive work experience and employee gives employer commitment and discretionary effort, etc. This contract can be managed in part through employee feedback loops, if leaders proactively and explicitly communicate what they learn from employees and what actions are expected from themselves and employees as a result.

Feedback Fatigue

Gathering employee feedback is only the beginning of a robust and effective employee engagement effort. The proficiency with which feedback is now collected at most companies must be matched by a bias for taking action on it. In the Workplace Field Guide distributed at Culture First, Culture Amp CEO Didier Elzinga explains it best: “The common reason people don’t want to fill out your survey is that you haven’t done anything since the last one. They don’t have survey fatigue; they have lack of action fatigue.”

(I attended Culture First as an invited member of the press.)*