What is the Attitude in Your Organization?

by Donald Hoover

Highly successful organizations have a keen understanding of the habits and desires of their customers. Although customer awareness is common to many organizations, having an understanding of the habits and desires of the internal customer is a competitive advantage in great organizations. Successful organizations conduct Employee Attitude Surveys (EAS) to gauge employee perceptions of any number of personal and organizational areas, policies and procedures. The results of the EAS are very similar to an organizational "report card." The results also can give insights to employee engagement.

Michael Emmot, *People Management (2006)*, comments on the importance of employee engagement: "Employee engagement has become a new management mantra – and it's not difficult to see why. Engaged employees – those who feel positive about their jobs – perform better for their employers and can promote their organisation [sic] as an 'employer of choice'."

An organization that does not conduct an EAS has no idea how its members feel about objectives, goals, training, service, fair treatment, compensation etc. How can leaders use strategies aimed at motivating an organization without knowing what motivates the members? An EAS gives important insights to how/what members feel about an organization. By knowing how its members feel about an organization, leaders can make better decisions for organizational change.

Uses of an EAS

- To determine the climate of employee engagement.
- To understand the effects of policy and procedure enforcement.
- To better understand the culture of the organization.
- To discover gaps in training and development needs.
- Provide a benchmark for organizational change.

7 Steps in Conducting an EAS

1. Dedicate the Resources. The organization must be certain to have the resources available to conduct a survey. As noted by Joanne Lawrence, *Personnel Today (2007)*, "Before starting an employee research project, it is important to be very clear why the research is needed and what the company hopes to gain from it. A reality check is always useful – can the company cope with this type of project given its current commitments? Will it have the resources available to act upon the results? Does senior management support the project?"

2. Create the Questions. The questions in a survey define the objectives of the organization. The lead-in to the survey questions should explain why the organization is conducting the survey.

- Instructions for completion should be clear and concise.
- Questions should be simple and understandable to all employees. The survey may be conducted in several languages.
- Ask one topic item per question.
- Decide on the type of survey to be conducted. Interview or questionnaire. An interview is time consuming and is a resource drain. The questionnaire style is most common.
- Decide what you want to know. Think with the end in mind. Ask questions that speak to the critical areas of the organization. There may be sections with topics such as policies, benefits, work-life, management equity/fairness etc.
- Utilize focus groups to ensure understanding of the questions.
- Ask demographic questions with the end in mind. For example, do you want to know how hourly employees answered specific questions compared to salaried employee responses? Do you want to know differences in union/non-union responses?
- Give the option of electronic or hard copy questionnaires.
- Have a section for "open" responses/comments.

3. Conducting the Survey. There are two major areas of concern in conducting a survey, validity and confidentiality (integrity) of the data.

<u>Validity</u> - It is important to have a high response rate. In order to have survey results that genuinely reflect the organization, it is necessary to have a statistically valid sampling from your organization. The higher the response rate, the more accurate the results. A forty percent (40%) response rate is acceptable.

<u>Confidentiality</u> - Guarantee anonymous responses. Many organizations consider a third party administrator to conduct the survey to reduce any anxiety over confidentiality of survey responses.

4. Analyze the Results (Benchmark Against Other Organizations). After the results of the survey are calculated, it is important for the leadership to understand the positive and negative data. Armed with the climate information of the organization, the leadership must create plans to improve upon weaknesses and expand upon strengths.

- Understand the results of the survey.
- Create plans to improve weaknesses and expand strengths in alignment with organizational objectives.

5. Post the Results. The results of the survey should be posted in conspicuous places throughout the property for all to see. By posting the results, the leadership displays that full disclosure is the beginning of organizational change. This full disclosure posting step is critical to achieving "buy-in" for future surveys.

6. Conduct Communication Meetings to Review the Results and Future Plans. The top leadership must share the results of the EAS with the entire organization in a simple message. Meetings should be conducted to communicate the results of the EAS and the plans for change. Communicating the EAS results shows the organization that the leadership is listening. The message should clearly show the EAS results on critical areas and any plans/timelines for change.

- Share the results with everyone.
- Communicate plans/timelines for change.

7. Continue the Cycle. Follow-up the survey with annual surveys. Once the initial survey is completed, a benchmark will exist to show improvements/lapses in plans to critical areas of the organization.

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and (4) identify learning issues. Learning issues are relevant questions that require further investigation and clarification. It is important to note that this process is repeated several times to establish confidence towards problem resolution.

Step 3: Individual Reading-Research-Preparation (RRP Analysis)

During this phase, adult learners collect information they need from a variety of sources such as books, journals, the Internet, on-line databases, content experts, consultants, etc. In this way, adult learners will learn how to search out current information.

Step 4: Synthesis and Evaluation

During this last step, adult learners (1) communicate what they have learned, (2) re-evaluate their hypotheses, or (3) formulate new hypotheses in light of their new learning experience. It permits them to apply their newly acquired knowledge to the problem. In other words, adult learners reconstruct the problem through the lens of their own newly accessed knowledge. Additionally, they share information about how they obtained their data and assess their resources, all of which helps them to become self-directed learners.

The distinction from the case-method is that the problem is introduced before adult learners have learned theoretical concepts, not after. The instructor does not initially present or synthesize all the information required to solve the problem. The H.O.T.S. approach consequently provides a greater realism and free inquiry, with more motivation and focus on part of the learner.

Finally, what differentiates the H.O.T.S. training environment from a conventional instructor-centered classroom is the fact that adult learners do most of the work. They collect information, they propose hypotheses and conclusions, they work in teams, and they do research outside the classroom. In other words, they are already self-directed and modeling the performance that is desired in the work environment.

It is subsequently the responsibility of the operational department to challenge, monitor, and encourage the new H.O.T.S. level until it becomes the plateau from where we reach for new performance heights through 'Higher Order Thinking Skills.' ♣

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Conducting an EAS is the first step in understanding whether an organization's team is satisfied/engaged. Benjamin Schneider, *Leadership Excellence (2006)* sees a difference between employee satisfaction and employee engagement: "Before you can increase engagement, you first must measure it. An accurate measure of employee engagement requires a special survey-not the employee satisfaction survey. There is a difference between employee satisfaction and engagement.

- Satisfied employees feel pleasant, satiated, content, and gratified. And they tend to have low absenteeism, low turnover, and low substance abuse. But they may be neither engaged nor motivated to expend extra effort in their work or for customers.

- In contrast, engaged employees behave in ways that enhance the customer experience. They go the extra mile in the interest of service quality and customer satisfaction. When your customers receive superior service every day, it can have a dramatic impact on your financial health."

Conducting an EAS can be a costly financial endeavor and may be time consuming to the staff of an organization. The long-term benefits to the organization of conducting the EAS far outweigh the costs. Considering the use of a third party administrator to conduct the survey is an important decision for the leadership of an organization. There are many third party survey administrators who can achieve successful results and report how your organization compares with others in similar industries. The most difficult decision that the organization must make is whether to begin the EAS process. A well-handled first survey will set the stage for the success of future surveys. Follow up and communicating the results of the EAS are important to the team's commitment to organizational goals. If the EAS is handled with importance of a guest survey, the organization can act on the results to celebrate victories and to make changes critical to the needs of the people. ♣

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