



Agree or Somewhat Likely to Agree – the Pros and Cons of Employee Feedback Surveys

Insights

9.19.16

Employee engagement is a vital component to any business. Having your employees focused on the strategic aims of your company, and not distracted by an unsatisfying work environment is key. Employers have long used employee surveys and focus groups to gain employee feedback in an effort to gauge their employees' satisfaction with their workplace. Gig economy employers are no different; however, not surprisingly, some are approaching this issue in new and innovative ways.

Companies like Techstars, Airbnb, Kickstarter, and Medium have utilized "Know Your Company," a unique software package designed to gain feedback from employees. For \$100 per employee, three times a week, "Know Your Company" emails staff members questions ranging from basic polls regarding what everyone is working on, specific questions related to the company or its actions, or general ice breakers. While most responses are seen by fellow employees, employees can make some responses be seen only by the CEO.

Like any solicited feedback, there are pros and cons to receiving this information and utilizing a platform such as "Know Your Company." While the expense to utilize a platform such as "Know Your Company," is likely a straightforward con depending on your company size, in my view, many of the perceived benefits can be both positive and negative.

My first thoughts go to frequency and time. Surveying employees three times a week means you have a wealth of almost real-time information from employees. As an employer, you have a weekly progress report on how you are doing on a variety of issues. This gives you a unique insight into your workforce. On the other hand, you now have a weekly progress report on how you are doing on a variety of issues. Employers will need a game plan addressing how to process and respond to this information.

Logistically, who in the organization owns the review of this information? How does that person prioritize how to address issues raised by the responses? How do you determine how the issues fit into your strategic goals? What is the threshold of dissatisfaction that forces you to make a change? Practically, the employer has now increased the workload of one of its employees (or an entire department), likely the HR department, to what end? Can the employer make the organizations nimble enough, able to timely and effectively respond to issues raised, without being purely reactionary, appearing to make knee-jerk reactions to the weekly feelings and whims of its staff?

Speaking of time, how much extra time will staff members spend on these surveys rather than their core work assignments? Logistically, it is important to remember that the time spent completing these surveys will be compensable time for non-exempt employees. Practically, the publicized survey results offered by “Know Your Company” can increase employee discussions regarding non-business related topics. At least one company who has utilized the “Know Your Company” software has noted that the ice breaker survey results have led to more “water cooler” type conversations with their staff. We all know that the “water cooler” experience, in moderation, is an important part of the office environment; but we also know that to excess, it can lead to a decrease in productivity. Now, not only will employees be discussing their weekend plans, but add to that discussion whether Sarah in Marketing likes olives or not. Will your survey results provide more fodder for the “water cooler” conversations such that productivity is decreased?

Finally, let’s discuss the information gathered. The wealth of information in some instances is invaluable. For example, the company could be alerted to a potentially serious issue, whether it be in quality control or learning about discrimination or harassment. The company will learn a great deal about itself and the people who make it up – but merely gathering this information will not be enough. Companies must affirmatively act on the information they receive or run the risk of alienating its employees. Arguably, not caring about what your employees think and feel is less offensive than seeking out your employees’ feedback on what they think and feel and failing to take remedial measures to address topics the employees raise. Employers will also need to ensure that whomever is reviewing the survey results can appropriately issue-spot and escalate responses where appropriate. A report that birthday celebrations are great, including the birthday hugs from Bob in Accounting, could be innocuous or could be indicative of a larger issue with Bob.

“Know Your Company” and similar employee satisfaction-type surveys provide employers with feedback and insight on its workforce to support employee engagement efforts. Employees who are engaged are better employees. Better employees are better for your business. However, before embarking on any type of survey for employee feedback, employers must have a plan in place as to how they will respond to their employee concerns in a meaningful way.

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