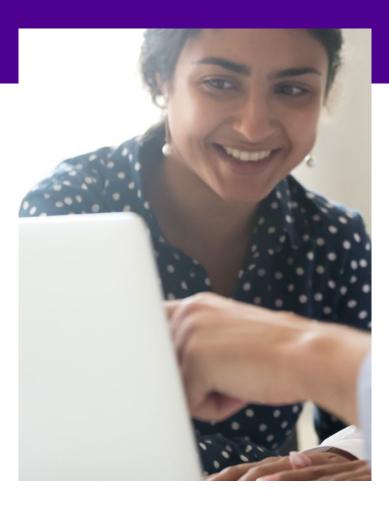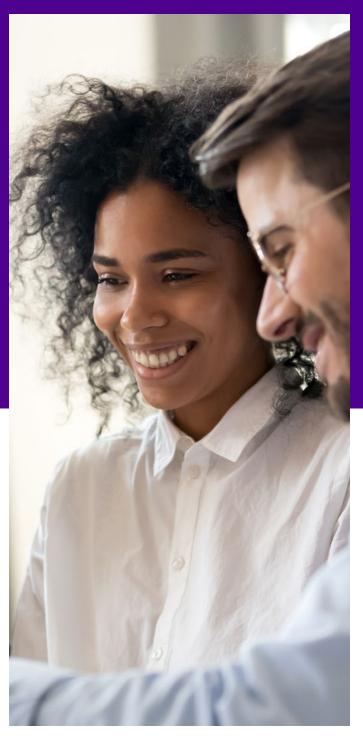# AWI Essentials:
Voice of Employee

Achievers

Communication is spoken of as the cure for many organizational problems, from fear and uncertainty to engagement and professional development. However, often overlooked are the many ways in which listening to the voice of the employee is key to effective communication. Developing a culture of listening enables organizations to be proactive in addressing problems, meeting employee needs, and designing people-centered policies.

Achievers Workforce Institute

The mission of Achievers is to Change the Way the World Works and we know that, in order to fulfill that mission, we must use research and science to guide our efforts. The Achievers Workforce Institute (AWI) is the research arm of Achievers, the home for our data scientists, researchers and employee experience experts, and ensures that everything we deliver to the business arena – from our technology to our thought leadership – is rooted in science

Overview

The Achievers Workforce Institute finds that organizations that regularly gather feedback and information from their employees, and then take action on that feedback, enjoy more engaged staff, higher productivity, lower absenteeism, and reduced turnover.

According to the AWI 2020 Culture Report, individuals who provide feedback 4 or more times a year are more engaged at work and the AWI 2021 Culture Report found that employees who provide regular feedback are also more likely to feel a strong sense of belonging.

Why listen to your employees?

Over the past decade, the value of asking employees for what they need, how they feel, and what they think or know has gained a great deal of followership because of the positive impact businesses experience when receiving rich, authentic, timely feedback. This type of feedback helps leaders enhance the performance of their business — partially because employees who feel heard are nearly 5 times more likely to do their best work, according to Salesforce research. That's why we see the increasingly common shift away from surveying once every year or two, to having a much more sophisticated and thoughtful employee voice process.

How does a Voice of Employee (VoE) focus differ from engagement surveying?

Tools to gather the voice of the employee extend far beyond the annual engagement survey, or even more regular pulse engagement surveying. From ad hoc polls to always-on listening tools, VoE is a toolkit for engaging, educating, and informing employees about the moments that matter in the workplace.

A well designed VoE program empowers leaders to:

- Get closer than ever to employees by giving them opportunities to declare opinions and have their ideas heard.

- Continuously measure the employee experience in an effort to calibrate working conditions and ensure everyone can adapt in an agile manner.

- Capture sentiment on everything from feelings about a project or the simplification of processes to the evolution of organizational strategy.

Beyond tools like engagement and lifecycle surveys, which map and track the employee journey, there are many ways that organizations can use feedback to drive better business outcomes. Given that, the utilization of employee feedback should not sit solely in the hands of HR. Feedback is most powerful when also used by front line managers, business unit leaders, and by the owners of organizational areas such as safety; diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging; corporate social responsibility; wellness and more.

Though many exist, we'll explore the four main VoE approaches, each of which gathers input in different ways.

1 Measure

Sometimes you just need data. Commonly including "rank or rate" questions, this type of feedback helps bring focus to future action or communication, gathers opinion, and lets you know where your employees sit on a specific issue or area.

Example: Asking employees about their experience with the Employee Assistance Plan or to rate their stress or workload on a scale of 1-10.

Common tools: Surveys, polls.

2 Download

To download and respond is to ask for feedback on a specific experience. This is a powerful way to gauge satisfaction as well as collect comments and questions to then iterate on the experience and drive continual improvement.

Example: Providing a demo of a new tool or process and then asking for live feedback.

Common tools: Surveys, emails, meetings with Q&A.

3 Discuss

This type of feedback is topic-focused, allowing employees to share their input and concerns. It can help manage complexity by gathering specific feedback through interactive discussion.

Example: Creating a focus group of employees to crowdsource tips for working from home.

Common tools: Virtual meetings, learning sessions, collaborations, discussions.

4 Co-create

Finally, you can ask employees to co-create with you, with their insight helping to drive strategy. Get input, ideas, and areas for improvement through small groups or one on one discussions. This type of feedback can help drive commitment, as people tend to feel more invested in the outcome of the sessions when they help to develop the process.

Example: Establishing a Leadership Advisory Board to invite employees from a variety of departments, lengths of tenure and seniority to shape strategy on specific topics.

Common tools: Summits, storytelling, focus groups, collaborations, discussions.

AWI Engagement Science Model

Though VoE extends beyond engagement surveying alone, understanding best practices for gathering and using engagement data can be useful in informing many types of employee feedback collection.

To measure and manage engagement, we must first understand how engagement functions. Achievers Workforce Institute research has shown that the business arena has been addressing engagement with a set of outdated assumptions treating engagement as: static — as if it can be measured every year or every other year, generic — as if it were responsive to one size fits all solutions, and automatic — as if it can be improved via data collection and action planning alone.

However, academic research has demonstrated that we, instead, need to be treating engagement as highly fluid, exceptionally personal and requiring real-time micro-action, in order for leaders to be able to understand and address engagement issues before they result in a negative impact on organizational performance.

These principles of engagement are applicable to any approach used to understand the voice of the employee. Treating employee voice as fluid, personal, and requiring action will enhance organizations' ability to track and use feedback to drive better business results.

Fluid
Engagement changes day to day and even moment to moment. It should be measured frequently using a consistent survey with specific questions to measure engagement in the same way every time. Achievers Workforce Institute recommends measuring 3-4 times a year and using the engagement indicator questions based on whether an employee would recommend their employer, is committed to their role, and enthusiastic about their job.

Personal
Engagement is determined at the local level, so must be personal. In practice this means that engagement survey and continuous listening data should be broken down to the smallest possible level without compromising anonymity. For example, Achievers analyzes data at the team level, for those with teams of 5 or more. This allows for a balance between anonymity and personalized responses so team leaders can target actions to their team's needs.

Action
Engagement requires real-time micro-action. AWI research shows there is no such thing as survey fatigue, only inaction fatigue. In fact, according to the AWI 2020 Culture Report, almost two-thirds of employees wish to be surveyed more often. To avoid inaction fatigue, with every engagement survey, managers should focus on 2-3 specific issues, with 1-2 micro-actions identified per issue. Micro-actions are those that can reasonably be executed by a person or small team – and in a relatively short period of time (ideally before the next survey). Micro-actions make for a manageable action list, rather than requiring large-scale, company-wide action plans that are rarely successful. It's also important to note that not every problem can be solved immediately but asking and then closing the loop to say "I heard you and we're trying to find a solution" is an important way of ensuring employees feel heard and valued.

Action is crucial not just for engagement surveys, but for any feedback gathering exercise. Individuals want to know that they are being heard and valued with specific change being driven by their responses.

How often should you listen to employees?

There is a lot of concern around frequent surveying but employee research confirms that they don't mind providing regular feedback as long as action is being taken. According to the 2020 Culture Report, almost two-thirds of employees actually want to be asked for feedback more frequently. The more you act on the data received, the more forthcoming individuals will be. However, the 2021 Engagement and Retention Report found that just 16% of organizations are always taking action on feedback.

What listening methods are best?

There is no single right way to solicit the voice of the employee. Every individual has different preferences in terms of how they want to communicate, so the best approach is to have multiple methods to meet disparate needs. The AWI 2020 Culture Report found that 77% of people are more honest in surveys than in conversation with their manager, showing the importance of offering employees' multiple ways to provide feedback.

Here are some effective methods to gather input from employees:

1 **Pulse engagement surveys** (3-4 times a year)
Engagement surveys are just one tool for gathering Voice of the Employee feedback. This should be a short list of 12-16 questions that you ask regularly to compare results and understand engagement trends in your organization.

2 **Topical feedback surveys**
These ad hoc surveys meet specific needs for information, such as asking about COVID-19 support requirements, or return to work preferences.

3 **Lifecycle surveys**
Ensure you understand the work experience of every employee at each stage of their career such as 30, 60, and 90 day new employee surveys as well as exit surveys and other key times in the employee journey.

4 **Always-on VoE tools**
Introducing a continuous-listening tool that can gather key data in between engagement surveys empowers employees to anonymously inform their manager of issues they're facing and where they need help in real time.

5 **One on one meetings**
According to the AWI Manager Empowerment Report, employees who are satisfied with both frequency and quality of one to one meetings with their manager are more engaged. However, these meetings often devolve into tactical review of tasks. Keep them meaningful by focusing on where employees need support and how their manager can help them.

6 **Townhalls or company-wide office hours**
Empower employees with access to senior leaders through townhalls and office hours, where they have the opportunity to ask questions and receive real-time responses.

7 **Employee Resource Groups** (ERGs)
Ensure you're hearing from marginalized and special interest groups in your organization by seeking input from ERGs, allowing you to better understand the needs of specific parts of your community.

Ask the experts

Close the loop on all feedback methods by checking back in with your experts, your employees. Ask them: is this process working? Are the solutions benefitting you? Your employees best know what they need and whether they're seeing the right actions and the desired outcomes from those actions. This type of continuous back and forth flow of information and communication empowers your organization to exceed employee expectations and meet their needs at every level. Remember, as long as you're taking action on feedback, employees are happy to continue to give their input.

What's next in VoE?

Voice of Employee is an evolving space. A relative newcomer to HR strategy, leaders are really just scratching the surface on all the ways to gain and leverage the Voice of the Employee. While we are only at the beginning of this journey, the powerful impact of utilizing science-based methods of gathering employee engagement data, robust continuous listening tools, and easy-to-implement ad hoc survey solutions is clear. Your organization should be taking advantage of every opportunity to listen to employees, communicate tactics, and close the loop with feedback on actions taken.

Developing a robust VoE strategy ensures your organization will be a market leader in gathering and acting on employee feedback — leading to happier, more engaged employees and better business results.

Learn more about the tools you need in your VoE toolkit

Request an Achievers Listen demo today

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