

CASE STUDY

DISH Network Redefines Employee Engagement through a New Survey System

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Overview

DISH Network is best known for its satellite and Internet-based pay-TV providers, servicing more than 13 million subscribers. While television distribution has always been at the company's core, it is transforming into what its leaders call a "connectivity company." DISH's vision is to play a major part in a technological evolution in which billions of devices—from autonomous vehicles to smart cities to diagnostic home health care—are connected to the Internet at breakneck speeds. In 2008, DISH began acquiring strategic holdings of wireless spectrum licenses and is building out one of the nation's largest 5G-compatible wireless networks. Throughout its evolution, DISH has applied a heavy focus on employee engagement.

DISH places a major focus on employee engagement, and as such recently overhauled its engagement program. Beyond survey results, HR and senior business executives wanted to give leaders—from the CEO to frontline managers—the resources and tools to address engagement issues with their teams. This case study explores the ways in which DISH places its employee engagement efforts as a key factor in the company's growth and transformation.

In This Case Study

- ✓ The business challenges facing DISH Network and how engagement is viewed as a key to future success
- ✓ The five-year evolution of employee surveys at DISH and the resulting impact on engagement
- ✓ Why the company shifted from a large, annual survey to a real-time survey released every four months
- ✓ How DISH's new engagement platform has given managers the resources and tools to take concrete action to address engagement issues in their teams





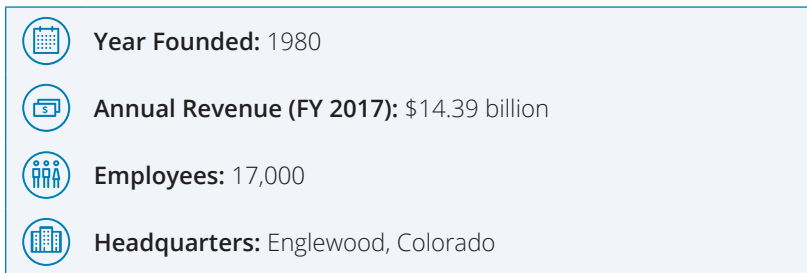
Company Overview

DISH Network was founded in 1980 as EchoStar, a budding C-band satellite retailer. Recognizing a need for growth, the company launched its first satellite into orbit in 1995. A few months later, the company began using the satellite to broadcast programming directly to consumers around the United States.

Today, DISH is a Fortune 250 company and a leader in the pay-TV industry. It provides a range of TV options to its more than 13 million subscribers through small-dish antennas and receivers and its groundbreaking live streaming service, Sling TV.

DISH is headquartered in Englewood, Colorado, with more than 100 offices, call centers, warehouses, and distribution centers across the United States. Its 17,000 employees include home installation experts, hardware and software engineers, customer service and sales reps, and professionals across the corporate spectrum, including finance, IT, marketing, HR, and more. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1: DISH at a Glance¹



Source: *DISH Network, 2018.*

Business Environment and Challenges

DISH shares the pay-TV space with some of the largest and strongest telecommunications and media companies in the world, and new contenders emerge regularly. The field is highly competitive and consumer habits are rapidly changing—baby boomers and Generation X consumers are “cutting the cord” to their cable and satellite-TV subscriptions, while Millennials and younger consumers are accustomed to receiving their news, information, and entertainment over tablets and mobile phones.

DISH's core business is in a period of major transformation. The company's Sling TV streaming service is an appealing prospect for cord-cutters, but the company's future—and most of its investment—is in the wireless space. In the company's latest annual report, the chairman reinforced the same message:

Nearly four decades later, our adventure continues but our mission remains constant: to change the way people communicate.²

—Chairman, DISH

Further, the company hopes to provide wireless connectivity to “tens of billions” of devices across an array of industry sectors, such as health care, entertainment, transportation, and machine automation.³

¹ *DISH Annual Report, Year Ending December 31, 2017*, DISH Network, <https://dish.gcs-web.com/static-files/a68c07ba-f17b-4e4c-b561-4ff3f7e0a15c>.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

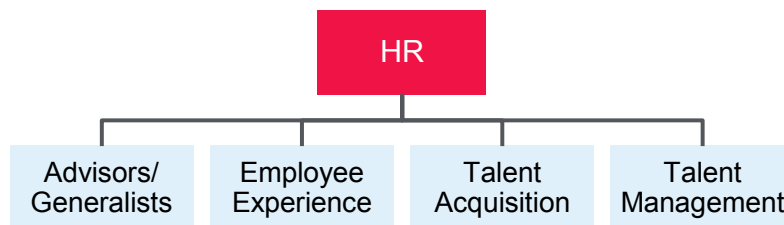
To achieve its lofty goals, DISH needs a team of fully engaged employees. This includes not only customer-facing, frontline workers but also senior executives and managers at every level. Without an engaged workforce—and an understanding of what drives engagement—DISH's leaders believe they cannot transform or effectively compete in their industry.

HR Environment

The chief human resources officer at DISH reports to the company's CEO. The HR function is broken up into a series of teams, including talent acquisition, talent management, and shared services. And HR advisors serve all lines of the business, both field and corporate functions.

Employee engagement is an organizational development effort, one that is facilitated by the talent management team (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: DISH Network's HR Organizational Structure



Source: DISH Network, 2018.

Engaged for Transformation

In 2012, the market for pay-TV in the United States was well-saturated. Cord-cutting was beginning to take hold, with consumers giving up traditional pay-TV, including satellite and cable, in favor of streaming content over the Internet. For DISH, this meant a possible future of disruption and slow progression in its traditional services.

To continue its growth, the company entered the early stages of a long transformation into wireless infrastructure, services, and connectivity.

DISH has a long history of being an industry disruptor, so we are not afraid to make massive changes to our business to innovate for our customers, employees, and shareholders. Our connectivity company transformation will be our largest and most challenging yet, so we will need to perform at our best. Building the industry's best team, anchored by very high engagement levels, will be a key to our success as we change the way the world communicates.

—Senior Vice President, Human Resources,
DISH Network

To understand employee engagement at DISH, the company launched its first companywide employee engagement survey in 2012. Beyond measuring engagement, DISH intended to determine what the company needed to do to retain employees and attract critical new talent to drive a transformation.

The initial survey was typical of the time and reflective of many large-company surveys, which included:

- A neutral third-party to collect employee feedback
- Efforts to ensure employee anonymity
- The creation of a baseline understanding of how to survey thousands of employees, including many who worked in the field without access to a laptop
- A focus on important areas like manager effectiveness, job tools and resources, and communication

However, the survey also had several drawbacks:

- A dated interface
- Too many (close to 40) questions
- A three-week lag between survey close and availability of results
- Lack of action resulting from the survey

The team repeated the survey for the next three years. While the results provided a good foundation of knowledge, employees felt that follow-up action was not being taken—it often took months for results to cascade down to frontline leaders and team members, and managers struggled to distill meaning and prioritize action items.

In 2015, only 56 percent of employees gave the company “favorable” scores on whether “meaningful action would be taken as a result of the survey.”

The problem was compounded by leaders who were not consistently transparent with results. This meant employees took the survey but rarely heard any follow-up on trends, directional insights, progress updates, or other useful information.

KEY POINT: The biggest problem with DISH’s early employee surveys was that the results did not help leaders or managers take action.

To address some of these issues, the HR team shifted to quarterly pulse surveys with a rotating sample—each individual employee was surveyed twice a year. Managers, however, felt that the surveys were not representative of the entire employee population and tended to discount these quarterly results.

The talent management team needed to make a significant change. It wanted a solution that made engagement interesting but also provided insights for managers to take concrete action. The team wanted an engagement tool that would spur ongoing dialogue and accountability, rather than a once-a-year assessment or a quarterly check-in.

KEY POINT: The talent management team wanted a solution that made engagement interesting but also provided insights for managers to take concrete action.

A New Kind of Engagement Survey

DISH's talent management team began meeting with the company's senior and executive vice presidents on a biweekly basis as part of a steering committee to gain input and alignment on talent management strategy. The underlying objective of the steering committee's creation was to ensure that leadership initiatives aligned with company goals. Employee engagement was added to the ongoing meetings to cement it as a business priority championed by senior leadership, not just HR.

The HR department and steering committee wanted to do more to understand their workers and support employee engagement. The company began searching for a new engagement partner and selected Glint, a real-time employee engagement platform based in Redwood City, California.

Different from a traditional engagement survey firm, the solution provider's cloud-based engagement platform gives managers simple, real-time data, analytics, and action-planning tools.

KEY POINT: Employee engagement was included in the talent management team's ongoing meetings with senior and executive vice presidents to cement it as a business priority championed by senior leadership, not just HR.

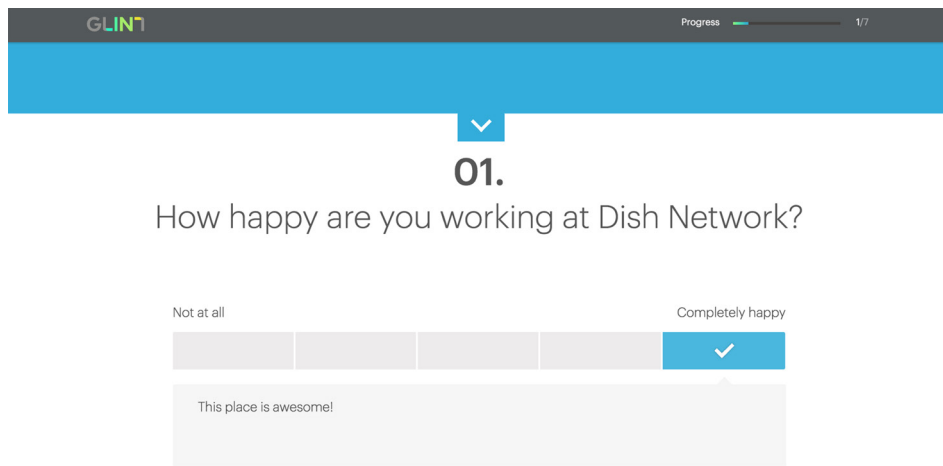
Fine-Tuning the Questions

The DISH team wanted to fine-tune its survey questions. With Glint's help, the talent management team streamlined the original 40 questions down to just 20 items, including questions and statements for employees to rate. These included:

- How happy are you working at DISH?
- I have clearly defined and documented goals.
- I feel satisfied with the recognition or praise I receive for my work.
- I feel empowered to make decisions regarding my work.
- DISH delivers a high level of excellence to our customers.

DISH launched its new survey—with an improved selection of questions—in 2016 (see Figure 3). With only 20 response items and a modern user interface, employees could complete the survey in a matter of minutes. The window for taking and completing the survey remained at two weeks.

Figure 3: User Interface of DISH's Redesigned Engagement Survey



Source: *Glint, 2018.*

Moving to Action with Speed

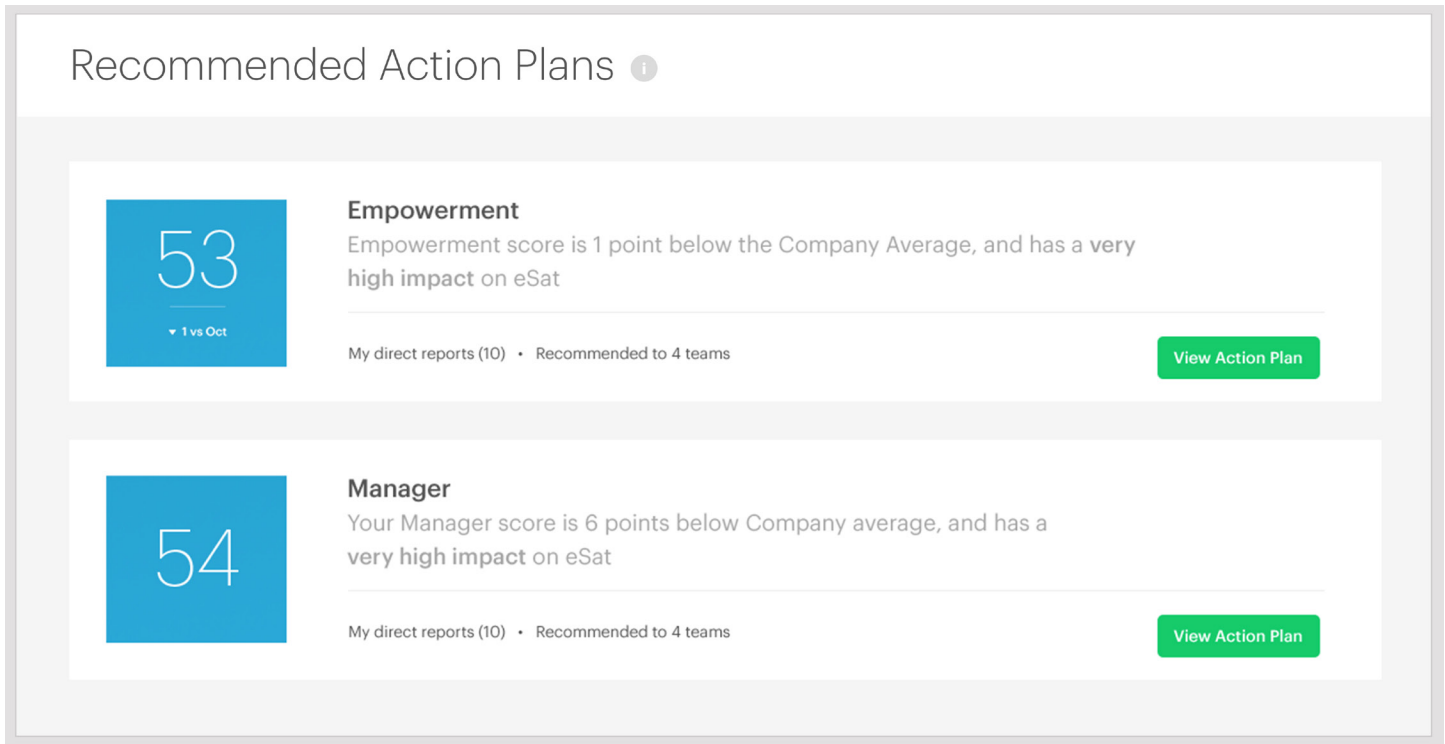
With the new survey mechanism, senior leaders and frontline managers can view results in real time as soon as the survey meets reporting thresholds. The old system often took up to three weeks to produce viewable results.

Department heads across the company can see results of their own teams via a department-level heat map, which highlights areas of concern and success. Furthermore, every senior and executive vice president can view results across the enterprise.

Beyond giving managers results in real time, the new platform also reveals key areas of concern or opportunity for every eligible manager (see Figure 4). For example, the survey results show managers which issues are most important to their teams' engagement levels—such as career, recognition, and work-life balance. These results are based on algorithms, rather than just high and low scores. As of 2018, DISH surveys the entire employee population three times a year.

KEY POINT: With the new survey mechanisms, senior leaders and managers can view results in real time compared to the three weeks they had to wait in the old system.

Figure 4: Algorithmically Driven Recommended Actions for Managers



Source: *Glint, 2018.*

Additionally, the new engagement platform offers managers a range of resources in the form of an action-planning system, which provides recommended improvement plans based on an individual's team scores. For example, for the career driver, this includes:

- **Why it matters.** Managers are provided a detailed description of why employees value their career growth and how it impacts engagement.
- **External resources.** From within the DISH / Glint dashboard, managers are offered several resources to learn more about the topic, including business articles and insights from Glint's people science team.
- **Action plans.** Each engagement driver comes with a customized action plan for managers to execute. For career, this includes four areas for action and specific ideas. Managers can also create their own plans (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Manager Resources to Act upon Employee Feedback on "Career"

The screenshot shows the Glint user interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'GLINT' logo, 'Dashboard', 'Explore' (selected), and 'Configure'. On the right, there are user profile icons and a 'Engagement' dropdown. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with 'Reports', 'Alerts', 'Comments', 'Pulses', and 'Action Plans'. The main content area is titled 'Career for My Team (35)' with an 'Active' status indicator. There are two tabs: 'Action Plan' and 'Resources' (selected). The 'Resources' section features three articles:

- Why Career Matters**: Published 3 days ago, 3 min read. Includes an image of two women looking at a document. Text: "People say they have good career opportunities when they feel they're growing in their professions—and they believe they'll continue that growth with their current employer. Career is one of the top drivers of Engagement, Retention, and..."
- 4 tips for finding great career mentors**: Published 1 month ago, 3 min read. Text: "When it comes to work, everyone needs advice. Whether you're not sure how to tackle an assignment or want to talk through an interesting job offer that came out of left field, there's nothing better than having a few mentors to help you out..."
- Understanding the "Growth Mindset"**: Published 3 days ago, 3 min read. Includes an image of two men. Text: "Scholars are deeply gratified when their ideas catch on. And they are even more gratified when their ideas make a difference — improving motivation, innovation, or productivity, for example. But popularity has a price: people sometimes..."

On the right side, there are two resource sections:

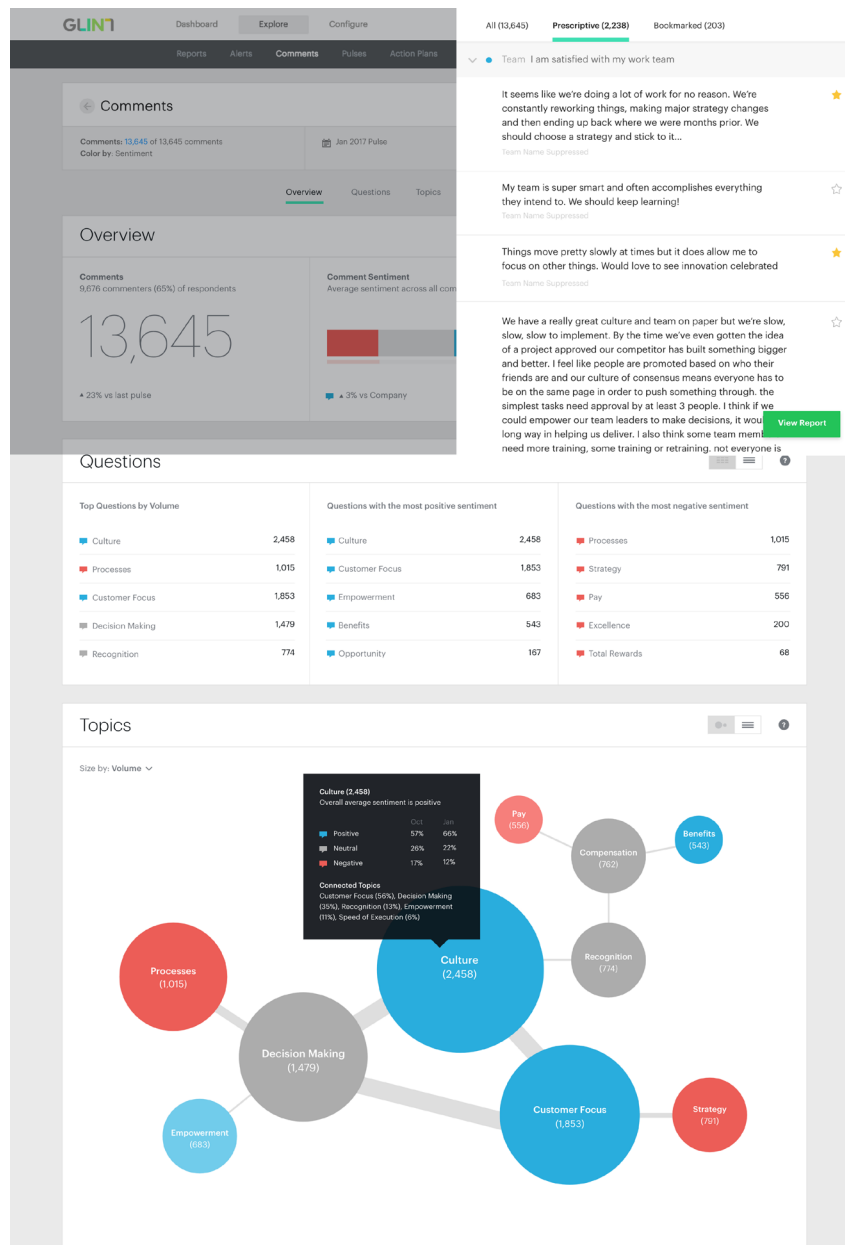
- External Resources**:
 - Teresa Amabile TedX talk on The Progress Principle (YouTube, 3 days ago)
 - Want Motivated Employees? Offer Ample Opportunities For Growth (Forbes, 6 days ago)
 - No Career Path, No Retention (YouTube, 1 month ago)
 - Why Employee Development is Important, Neglected and Can Cost You Talent (New York Times)
- Thrive, Co. Resources**:
 - Employee Learning Center
 - New Manager Training

Source: Glint, 2018.

Making Use of the Open-Ended Comment Data

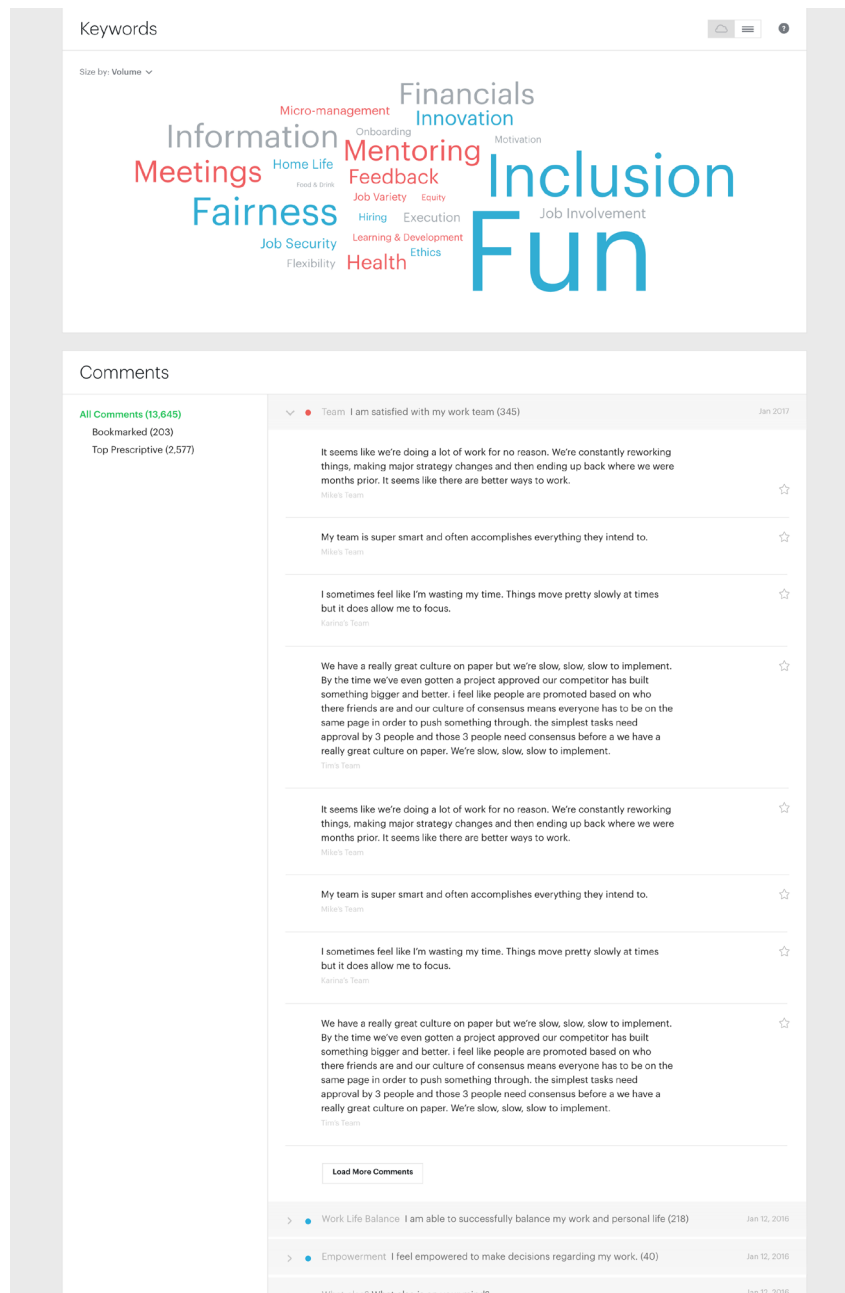
The new survey encourages comments and feedback from employees on every item, and employees have responded in kind: the most recent surveys yielded more than 30,000 comments. Unlike DISH's previous system, Glint's platform uses advanced text analytics via natural language processing to create a visual map of key themes highlighted in the verbatim responses. The platform surfaces meaningful analytics, including sentiment, trends, and how qualitative themes relate to one another. This allows managers and the talent management team to understand the quantitative responses even better (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Insights from Employees' Comments Using Natural Language Processing and Other Advanced Analytics



(cont'd on next page)
Source: Glint, 2018.

Figure 6: Insights from Employees' Comments Using Natural Language Processing and Other Advanced Analytics (cont'd)



Source: *Glint*, 2018.

The talent management team also uses the qualitative feedback to highlight areas for future development, including leadership development, communications, and other facets.

Business Impact

Employee engagement scores have increased by an average of more than 10 percentage points since DISH began measuring them in 2012. From 2016 to 2017, when DISH launched the new platform, the average engagement index increased by 3.3 percentage points across the board—most notably in the areas of prospects, culture, and career.

With more frequent feedback and insights, DISH's leaders and managers have been able to identify targeted opportunities to drive sustainable improvements in engagement and their business. For example, DISH was able to keep a pulse on its employees and address issues as they appeared after both a recent acquisition and the restructuring of select business units.

By utilizing more frequent feedback, actionable insights driven by both quantitative and qualitative data, and easily accessible results, DISH has reinvigorated the conversation around employee engagement and strengthened the partnership and mutual accountability between HR and leaders. Today, executives prioritize engagement as a critical driver while the business evolves from pay-TV services to wireless connectivity and Internet-based solutions.

Lessons Learned

- **Secure executive buy-in.** A key to success with engagement at DISH is the involvement of senior leadership. A steering committee made up of senior and executive vice presidents works with talent management to drive the process, develop questions, and create improvement plans at all levels of management.
- **Find the right cadence for your firm.** When DISH began surveying employees, it opted for a large annual survey. The company switched to a quarterly sample survey to get more frequent touchpoints, but that proved too frequent. Leaders didn't have enough time to implement action plans and close feedback loops with employees.
- **Drive action and communicate change.** While the survey alerts managers to potential problems, DISH's HR team and survey platform ensure managers have relevant resources and tools to understand and solve engagement issues and challenges. When action is influenced by survey feedback, it is important to directly communicate what feedback was received, which changes have been made, and to directly link those changes to survey feedback and discussions.

Next Steps

Attracting, developing, and retaining an effective team in times of massive change is one of DISH's strategic company objectives. The company's goal is to see that every team member is given the opportunity to realize their full potential. Creating a climate in which this is possible requires all DISH employees support each other in a shared way.

The steering committee has identified areas of focus and action plans across the enterprise for the coming year. For example, the organization plans to have a documented goal and development plan for every employee. DISH has switched from a quarterly survey to one that takes place three times per year: in April, August, and December. All eligible employees will have the opportunity to participate in the survey each time.

Conclusion

DISH's industry necessitates keeping pace with innovations and new technology, pivoting on strategies, and managing continuously changing consumer expectations. It is critical for the organization to continuously understand employee feedback and engagement. DISH's leaders wanted to ensure their 17,000-plus employees were fully engaged in order to drive a major transformation in the business.

Although the original survey—once per year, with 40 questions—gave the company a benchmark for how employees felt about the organization, it also revealed a glaring problem—employees felt that leaders and managers were not taking specific actions to solve problems identified in the surveys.

The company's talent management team and senior business leaders wanted a system that would do more than measure employee sentiment. They wanted a system that would give managers resources and tools to act upon the survey results.

Business leaders across DISH have come to expect this level of data, analysis, and action from their HR. By partnering with an outside firm, the organization was able to keep employee engagement in the center of its focus and generate actionable survey results that foster the company's current and future success. These survey results engender progressive employee performance as DISH transforms from pay-TV services to wireless and Internet-based solutions. ■

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Before joining Bersin, Madhura worked for Dell Technologies, where she led the annual global engagement survey for 110,000 employees, culture assessments for mergers and acquisitions, and several large-scale people analytics studies. Prior to her time with Dell, Madhura worked for Ford Motor Company and Aon Hewitt in the development and statistical validation of hiring assessments. Madhura has an MA and a PhD in industrial / organizational (I/O) psychology from Wayne State University in Michigan.

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