

# Action Planning Workbook

Turn your 4Cs Survey results into lasting change





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## ABOUT THIS PLANNING GUIDE

The Insightlink 4Cs Action Planning Guide is designed to help you transform the results of your employee survey into useful and effective strategic plans.

Research has shown that, after an employee survey has been conducted, employees are much more interested in seeing action taken than they are in just seeing the results of the survey. Employee surveys have little or no value if nothing is done to make improvements. This is why successful action planning is a critical component of successful employee surveys.

In this guide, you will receive practical advice, tips, and forms to help you navigate, understand, and take action on your employee survey results. This guide will help you to:

- Identify the key strengths of your organization;
- Identify the primary opportunities for improvement;
- Set short-, medium- and longer-term goals to address those areas of improvement;
- Prioritize key action items and identify the primary stakeholders who will be accountable for developing appropriate strategies;
- Develop an action plan (or multiple action plans) based on those key priorities/strategies that are tailored to the specific needs of your organization;
- Identify realistic timeframes for implementing each item in your action plan;
- Set up employee sessions to share the action plan with your employees and solicit employee suggestions and feedback on how to improve areas of concerns;
- Implement a communication strategy to keep employees updated while changes are being introduced as a result of your employee survey; and
- Develop metrics to measure progress as your action plan is implemented.

By taking these steps, your organization will start to share in the benefits that come from having a highly motivated and engaged employee workforce.



## THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The most critical phase of any employee survey process happens after you have conducted your survey and received your survey report. Once you've reviewed the survey results and identified your organization's primary areas of strengths and opportunities for improvement, you need to decide what to do next based on the results. This is the vital "Action Planning" phase of the process.

It is through your action planning that employees will judge the value of the organization's leadership, how well employees' voices are being heard in terms of improving their work experience and the strength of management's commitment to continuous improvement.

Although it is important to share the highlights of the survey with your workforce, employee surveys have little or no value if nothing is done to make improvements in your organization. This is why effective action planning is such an important component of successful employee surveys.

This Insightlink 4Cs Action Planning Guide is designed to help you work through your employee survey results, communicate the preliminary results to your employees, enable action planning with the employees and stakeholders who are responsible for creating change within your organization, inform your employees of the changes planned, implement your action plan effectively and then monitor its progress.

Your employee survey results represent an important starting point for follow-up action planning and should be the basis for structuring the next steps of the feedback process with your employees. However, since the survey results may not fully identify the underlying causes of the results, your action planning may also need to include discussions with senior leaders, frontline managers and employees so that additional opportunities for improvement can be determined and potential solutions can be identified.

Acting upon these opportunities and solutions through new initiatives and changes will help to enhance the working environment for your employees while also strengthening their relationship with the organization. Keep in mind that the ultimate goal of employee survey action planning is to maximize job satisfaction, employee commitment and engagement within your organization, not just for your employees' sake but also for the lasting benefit of your organization as a whole.



## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide will help lead you through the process, of understanding and interpreting your survey results, determining your primary action items and then creating a plan to implement change within your organization based on those action items. Feel free to read this guide in a sequential order or, alternatively, simply jump to the section most applies to your situation.

## EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION: AN INTRODUCTION

We believe that the level of job satisfaction in your organization is one of the most critical measures of any employee survey, since it encapsulates both what is important to your employees and how they feel about their jobs. In other words, job satisfaction is a vital “thermometer” measure of the health of your organization.

Consider that Insightlink’s recommended minimum for job satisfaction is that **65%** of employees should describe themselves as extremely or very satisfied with their jobs.

Employees’ satisfaction with their jobs is affected by a number of factors, including their relationships with coworkers, managers and/or supervisors, their impressions of senior leadership, their ongoing work activities, the availability of resources to do their jobs well, the perceived effectiveness of communications, the career enhancement and advancement opportunities available to them, how equitable they perceive the organization’s pay policies to be and their connection to the organization’s mission and direction.

An employee’s job satisfaction score reflects the impact of their day-to-day work environment and the role their coworkers and managers have on their state of mind. In contrast, employee commitment or engagement reflects their desire to work for an organization over the longer-term and their willingness to go “above and beyond” to help their organization succeed. Dissatisfaction with their work environment, though, can often negate their sense of commitment, contributing to lower morale, impeding staff productivity and leading to employee turnover.

In an ideal situation, you want to have both highly satisfied and highly committed employees. In practice, however, our research shows that employees are often highly committed to the organization but are often not as highly satisfied with their jobs. Solving the puzzle of what contributes to employee satisfaction is the first step toward building and supporting an engaged workforce.



Extensive research shows that committed and satisfied employees have a direct impact on an organization's performance and profitability. Specifically, organizations that have more committed and satisfied employees are more likely to have:

- Lower employee turnover;
- Better recruiting efforts, as they have the ability to choose from a larger pool of candidates;
- Greater operational efficiency and improved employee productivity;
- Higher customer satisfaction scores; and
- Better financial returns and improved financial performance.

Based on Insightlink's 4Cs Employee Benchmark Norms, just slightly more than one-half of all employees in the U.S. and Canada are extremely or very satisfied with their jobs. This means that, across all organizations, there is substantial room for improvement in employee satisfaction.

The strength of job satisfaction is highly influenced by the presence of key motivators, including employee recognition, sense of achievement, feelings of autonomy, independence and responsibility and perceived advancement opportunities. These motivators reflect an employee's psychological need to grow and achieve and they have a disproportionate influence on job satisfaction, both positively and negatively.

The good news, though, is that a concerted and organized action plan, based on concrete employee survey results, can lead to substantial improvements in employee satisfaction over a relatively short time frame. In fact, Insightlink clients achieve an average +7 percentage points increase in overall satisfaction between studies. This means that most organizations can reap more of the benefits that come from having a satisfied and committed workforce.

One of the most important benefits is the ROI (Return on Investment) that an organization can experience from boosting job satisfaction and employee engagement. These are direct monetary returns that result from reducing the costs of both turnover and absenteeism and, at the same time, achieving higher revenue per employee since engaged employees work more efficiently and are more focused on their job roles and responsibilities. Generating a positive ROI from a successful employee survey and effective action planning is clearly a meaningful outcome from all perspectives, so keep that goal in mind through all stages of your action planning process.



## THE 4CS OF EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION

Insightlink’s Action Planning Guide is based on the critical 4Cs of employee satisfaction: Commitment, Culture, Communications and Compensation. Together, these factors represent the key drivers of employee satisfaction and engagement.

### COMMITMENT

In a workplace setting, there are two key elements to commitment – the first is how committed employees feel toward their organization, which is what we call “employee commitment,” and the second is to what degree they believe their organization is committed to them or, in other words, “organizational commitment.”

“Employee commitment” measures how likely employees are to continue working for your organization, how willing they are to go above and beyond their call of duty to help your organization succeed and how motivated they are to consistently work to the best of their abilities. Highly committed employees are more likely to believe that working at your organization is more than just a job and they get a strong sense of personal accomplishment from the work they do.

Even employees who are dissatisfied with their jobs can feel a sense of commitment to the organization where they work, which is why employee commitment tends to be one of the highest scores in a 4Cs survey. However, true engagement requires both job satisfaction and strong commitment from employees.

“Organizational commitment,” on the other hand, measures employees’ perceptions of how well the organization reciprocates the dedication they demonstrate. High scores on organizational commitment are driven by the belief that employee loyalty is valued and rewarded and that the organization shows a genuine interest in its employees.

This rating is often driven by how well the senior management team listens and responds to employee ideas, how often they recognize excellent performance and how willing they are to acknowledge those employees who go “above and beyond” on behalf of the organization. Many organizations face a need to close the large gap between employee and organizational commitment.



## CULTURE

In the simplest terms, an organization’s culture is the set of common understandings and unspoken rules of how employees interact with each other. An organization’s culture – whether positive or negative – is almost always created and fostered by its senior management. Through both their communications and their actions, senior management establish the organization’s “values,” which represent its preferences for certain behaviors or specific outcomes, and the organization’s “norms,” which are its culturally acceptable ways of acting, behaving and pursuing goals.

Senior leaders set the tone by their own behavior that then cascades down to the rest of the organization. For example, if senior leaders support employee recognition and regularly acknowledge their contributions to the organization’s success, other managers and employees will follow suit and feel comfortable acknowledging employees’ good work.

On the other hand, if senior management is not seen as supporting accountability and fairness throughout the organization, employees are likely to believe that favoritism is rampant and that promotions are based on personal connections rather than merit. Similarly, they may experience or witness such favoritism themselves and believe that it is sanctioned by the organization’s leadership.

As a result, it is critically important that senior leaders both demonstrate and model the desired behavior they want from their employees. Whether senior leaders realize it or not, the types of behavior employees witness day-to-day almost always defines the culture of the organization.

For the purposes of organizational development and performance, it is important to cultivate a culture that is aligned with the organization’s business goals. For example, an organization that values innovation will encourage employees to experiment and treat errors as learning opportunities rather than penalizing employees for making mistakes.

Similarly, an organization that is committed to transparency should not share information selectively or be unwilling to listen to employees when changes are being developed or be reluctant to explain the rationale behind new policies when such changes are announced.

It is imperative that organizational leaders model the behavior and attitudes they expect their employees to demonstrate. A well-defined organizational culture cannot come about without clear direction from its senior leaders.



## COMMUNICATIONS

Effective corporate communication is often the foundation on which an organization's operations, processes and HR initiatives run smoothly. Ideally, organizational communications should be a two-way vertical and horizontal process, through which information, ideas and solutions to daily challenges flow between employees and management and across departments and teams. However, employees often feel that their attitudes and opinions are not considered when management makes changes to policies and procedures, which are often announced without warning or discovered only through the "grapevine."

At the most basic level, employees need to know what is expected of them at work. More importantly, employees want to know where the organization is headed and how their day-to-day activities contribute to achieving the organization's overall goals. Meanwhile, organizations are increasingly relying on cross-functional teams to serve client needs and this requires better cross-departmental communications to keep everyone on the team informed and up-to-date.

In addition, bottom-up communications from employees to managers and senior management are equally important. Management needs to create a work environment where employees are not afraid to speak up when they have questions or suggestions. Management must also take employee opinions and suggestions into account when making decisions and avoid the impression that employee thoughts and ideas "just don't count."

## COMPENSATION

Many studies have shown that, although offering fair and competitive compensation is critical to retaining employees, it is a "hygiene factor" in terms of employee satisfaction. Hygiene factors are the "maintenance" elements that are required in adequate amounts to avoid dissatisfaction but do not necessarily lead to greater satisfaction if improved upon. (Other hygiene factors include organizational policies, relationships with coworkers and job security.)

This means that paying employees much more than the prevailing market may not necessarily result in higher satisfaction with either their pay or their jobs. Employees tend to believe that the amount they are paid has a much bigger impact on their job satisfaction and behavior at work than is actually the case.



Overall, a sense of fairness and equity in pay policies usually has a greater impact on employee satisfaction with compensation than does the absolute amount of pay alone. Our experience shows that attitudes toward pay can be improved by educating employees about how their pay is determined, by maintaining reasonably transparent compensation practices and by implementing clear and achievable pay-for-performance policies. Having a good understanding of how they are paid helps employees know what they can do to improve their compensation and builds their belief in the fairness and equity of their pay.

In general, employee satisfaction with compensation tends to be lower than their satisfaction with other aspects of their work. For this reason, management should not be overly alarmed if the compensation satisfaction score is low. However, if it is significantly below your industry or country norms, then you should take action to address the reasons that are contributing to employees' low satisfaction, such as conducting a salary benchmarking survey to ensure that your pay levels are competitive.

There can also be some value in emphasizing the value of an employee's total "return," including benefits, rewards and bonuses and even the work environment itself, since this will help raise employees' awareness of what they receive in addition to their base pay.

## THE LOYALTY MATRIX

Insightlink's Loyalty Matrix gives you a valuable summary of your workforce by dividing your employees into four distinct segments – Committed Loyalists, Satisfied Opportunists, Change Seekers and Dissatisfied Compromisers. The size of each segment is calculated based on their overall job satisfaction and their anticipated tenure with your organization.

**Committed Loyalists** are those employees who are satisfied working at your organization and plan to stay for at least two years and, usually, much longer than that. Clearly, you want to maximize your proportion of Committed Loyalists because of the strong contribution they make to the morale, productivity and overall success of your organization. Therefore, Insightlink recommends striving to have at least **55%** or **60%** of Committed Loyalists in their organizations.

**Satisfied Opportunists** are the employees who plan to leave your organization even though they are satisfied with their jobs. These tend to be people who feel little loyalty to where they work and are always on the lookout for new opportunities. Ideally, they should not represent more than **5%** or **10%** of your employees.



**Change Seekers** represent the employees who are not satisfied working at your organization and plan to leave within the next two years. Together, the proportions of Satisfied Opportunists and Change Seekers indicate the risk of short-term employee turnover at your organization and, in turn, they represent a large component of your voluntary turnover costs. Positive action may help you reduce the proportion of Change Seekers but, for many of them, it may be too late.

Finally, **Dissatisfied Compromisers** are the employees who are not satisfied working at your organization but still plan to stay over the longer term. Another term for them are “Quit and Stay” employees who may have “checked out” in some senses but still show up for work.

Dissatisfied Compromisers are likely to drain your organization of resources and to decrease employee morale since they often don’t hide their dissatisfaction. We recommend that organizations strive to keep the proportion of Dissatisfied Compromisers to only about **20%** or **25%** in order to minimize their impact. We’ve experienced numerous cases where organizations have created meaningful action based on the weaknesses identified by their employee survey and have successfully transformed a good portion of their Dissatisfied Compromisers into Committed Loyalists.

The current distribution of all employees indicates that just slightly more than one-half of all employees can be classified as Committed Loyalists. This indicates that, on average, there is real room to improvement the level of engagement within many organizations:



The rest of this Action Planning Guide is designed to give you the tools to shift as many employees as possible into becoming Committed Loyalists.



## THE EMPLOYEE SURVEY ACTION PLANNING PROCESS

### GETTING STARTED

The action planning process typically begins with the delivery of your comprehensive employee survey report and often concludes with your first “post-wave” survey after a specific time period (usually a full 12 to 18 months following the benchmark survey). You should time your first post-wave survey so that it comes after your employees have experienced some of the changes that have been made. Subsequent future survey “waves” should also be conducted regularly in order to ensure that employee satisfaction-related gains are maintained and/or continuously improved.

The key steps for achieving successful action planning are to:

1. Review your overall employee survey results and prepare a Highlight Summary to share with your employees;
2. Use your survey results to set clear and specific goals to be met through your action plan;
3. Create an effective and viable action plan to achieve those goals, including a timetable for implementing each item in the plan;
4. Conduct Employee Survey Feedback Sessions to share the key findings and, more importantly, to communicate the action plan. These sessions will give your employees a reminder that their voices have been heard and to prepare them for the organizational improvements to follow; and
5. Monitor and measure progress regularly and celebrate successes as they occur.

### TIPS FOR CONDUCTING SUCCESSFUL ACTION PLANNING

Thank employees for participating in the opinion survey;

Remain objective when reviewing the report results;

Acknowledge and celebrate your organization’s strengths as well as recognizing your opportunities for improvement;

Manage employee expectations by setting boundaries on what can and cannot be done according to your organization’s goals and strategy. Say “no” when necessary but provide a reasonable rationale or explanation for the negative response;



Link all action planning to your organization’s strategic plan and mission;

Conduct action planning in a timely manner – not reacting so quickly that you don’t spend enough time giving careful consideration to the planning process, but not taking so much time that you lose momentum;

As much as is possible, engage as many employees as possible in the action planning process;

Raise awareness that your action plan came about as a result of listening to your employees’ input – “you made suggestions, we listened, now we are taking action to make things better”;

Keep employees updated on a regular basis about the progress of the action plan, including the challenges encountered and the successes achieved; and

Empower employees and work groups by delegating departmental or unit-level issues to individual task forces within the department or unit, while retaining organization-level issues for action by senior management.

## ACTION PLANNING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Improving employee satisfaction requires a partnership among all levels of management, employees and the relevant support services. Everyone has a role in the process, although it is important that all roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and documented. Here is a guide to potential roles and responsibilities across the various levels of the organization:

Senior Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Distribute the final employee survey report to the Senior Management Team and, if applicable, ensure that all divisional/departmental reports are also distributed;</li> <li>▪ Review the overall survey report and identify the top 2 or 3 organization-wide priorities within the first few weeks and then name a champion for each of these priorities;</li> <li>▪ Designate a key contact (typically HR) to coordinate the action planning process, typically divided between organization-wide planning and departmental or role-specific planning;</li> <li>▪ Select a key lead to develop all survey-related communications and to let employees know how the organization plans to tackle the issues raised by the employee survey;</li> <li>▪ Provide a forum for sharing ideas, thoughts, and reactions without recrimination; and</li> <li>▪ Offer active support for organizational, divisional, functional unit and/or departmental action planning.</li> </ul>
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<p>Divisional &amp; Departmental VPs &amp; Managers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review the appropriate divisional/departmental summary and share it with all direct reports;</li> <li>▪ Facilitate action planning at all levels;</li> <li>▪ Maintain communications with direct reports, departmental employees and HR on the progress of all action planning;</li> <li>▪ Complete and submit a Departmental Action Plan within 8 to 10 weeks of receiving the departmental report; and</li> <li>▪ Implement the approved Departmental Action Plan.</li> </ul>
<p>Human Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Carefully review the overall employee survey report to understand the main themes and, if applicable, examine the heatmap reports and the file of all employee comments for additional insight into the organization’s strengths and weaknesses;</li> <li>▪ Coordinate the action planning process with both Senior Management and department heads;</li> <li>▪ If appropriate, develop and implement the organization-wide action plan;</li> <li>▪ Decide what divisional or departmental reports need to be produced;</li> <li>▪ Facilitate discussion with employee groups when appropriate;</li> <li>▪ Get timely approval for Departmental Action Plans; and</li> <li>▪ Maintain communication with employees, managers, and senior leaders throughout the action planning process.</li> </ul>
<p>Frontline Managers &amp; Supervisors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review the appropriate divisional/departmental report with their employees;</li> <li>▪ Engage employees in the action planning process, such as requesting input into possible improvements;</li> <li>▪ Submit action planning recommendations to divisional/department heads; and</li> <li>▪ Implement the approved Departmental Action Plan.</li> </ul>
<p>All Employees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attend employee debriefing meetings, whether organization-wide or departmental (or both);</li> <li>▪ Help with action planning teamwork and/or volunteer to sit on a specific action planning task force;</li> <li>▪ Contribute ideas and recommendations to the action planning process;</li> <li>▪ Take part in employee focus groups if invited to do so; and</li> <li>▪ Participate in all appropriate follow-up surveys.</li> </ul>



## ACTION PLANNING: A 5 STEP PROCESS

We have found that the following 5-step process is the most effective approach to getting the most value from your employee survey results:



Let's now take a detailed look at each of these 5 steps and what part they play in effective action planning.

### STEP 1: UNDERSTANDING YOUR RESULTS

As a first step, review your employee survey report to get an overall understanding of the survey results and what it all means. The goal of this step is to get a balanced and complete view of what your employees are telling you and how they feel about their jobs and the organization. This is the “just the facts” stage of the process. Senior management and HR should both participate in this assessment of the findings. It is important to focus primarily on the recurring themes and major “take-aways” from your survey results and not on the most extreme results.

Once done, senior management and/or HR can start the conversation of how to best share the survey results with employees and how to move forward effectively with action planning.



## OBJECTIVES OF THE EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS REVIEW

The key objectives for reviewing your employee survey results in detail are to:

- Understand the overall level of satisfaction and engagement within your organization;
- Identify the major trends (whether positive or negative) that are impacting the level of job satisfaction within each of the 4 Cs (Commitment, Culture, Communications, Compensation);
- Determine, if appropriate, the major differences across individual departments/units/groups;
- Highlight the unanswered questions or open issues that need further exploration or discussion with employees; and
- Start to identify potential action areas.

## GENERAL DATA ANALYSIS PRINCIPLES

It is extremely important that you remain objective when reviewing your results and avoid analyzing them “defensively.” Read through the report with an open mind. Try to avoid over-reacting to the results - whether they are positive or negative - or leaping immediately to solutions. In other words, don’t try to “explain” the negative findings away. If there are high scores/praise surrounding a topic, it is probably a key strength and a foundation on which your organization can build. In contrast, if an issue/problem comes up again and again in a negative light, it is probably an issue that needs to be addressed.

A good starting point for your analysis is the overall level of job satisfaction and/or your Engagement Index. These scores are great “big picture” or “thermometer” measures of your organization’s health since they reflect the influence of many of your other survey results.

Pay attention to the distribution of the Loyalty Matrix and especially how it compares to the norms. How many of your employees are Committed Loyalists? How many are Dissatisfied Compromisers?

On the 5-point scale questions, look at both the overall distribution of responses and the “top two box” scores for each item. The “top two box” summary is a useful measure when analyzing and comparing findings across a substantial amount of data. It’s the results of these scaled questions – both high and low scores – that produce your “big picture” scores.

Remember that it’s normal to have at least some extreme results, whether extremely high or extremely low scores. Try not to get stuck there and concentrate on the general trends and patterns.



Looking primarily on the “top two box” percentages is an effective and widely used method for analyzing survey data. This approach makes data analysis easier and means results can be examined in a consistent fashion.

At the same time, though, this approach begs the question of when to decide which results require action. There are no hard-and-fast rules as to what level of favorable response/top two boxes is low enough to warrant action. This level can vary and depends a great deal on the particular aspect of work being evaluated. It may, for example, be far more important for your organization to take action if only 65% of your employees are satisfied with their ongoing training & development than if only 40% are happy with their pay.

Determining this requires that you have a good understanding of both your results and how those results fit with your own experience at your organization. You can also make use of Insightlink’s national and industry norms to help decide which results require action, keeping in mind that these norms are simply “averages” and not “best practice.” Still, the norms are very useful for giving context (such as helping you see “how high is high”).

In addition to referring to the norms, the following percentage guidelines can also be helpful in understanding the overall pattern in your employee survey results:

90% or more top two boxes	• Highly meaningful favorable response
75% - 89%	• Quite meaningful favorable response
65% - 74%	• Indicative of a favorable response
35% - 64%	• Requires further study
25% - 34%	• Indicative of an unfavorable response
11% - 24%	• Quite meaningful unfavorable response
10% or less	• Highly meaningful unfavorable response

As you continue your review, pay attention the largest importance-performance gaps in your results (if applicable) -- knowing what is important to your employees and how well your organization is doing on these items is often the starting place for improvements. As indicated in your report, all gaps of 20 percentage points or more are worth careful consideration but those that are 40 points or more should be viewed as critical.



## REVIEWING YOUR EMPLOYEES' COMMENTS

Finally, read the open-end (write-in) comments. Try to get a sense of the themes and issues that employees mention and see how these comments relate to the numerical results. Take note of the consistencies you see (i.e., are the issues raised in the open-ended comments also corroborated in the quantitative results?).

Constructive use of the written comments from your employees can play an important role in both amplifying and illustrating your survey numbers. There is a need for caution, however, when analyzing these comments since you must avoid the risk of letting individual comments “swamp” the patterns and trends in the numerical data.

While open-ended text questions provide your employees with an opportunity for self-expression, the analysis of such responses can be challenging.

When reading through these comments, it’s important to keep an eye out for the ideas and comments that are repeated, rather than focusing on the most outrageous, “extreme” or “outlier” comments. Watch for good suggestions and specifics to help you better understand your opportunities for improvement. Avoid obsessing over any comments that are hyper-critical, factually inaccurate, mean-spirited or unfair. Finally, never try to guess the author of a comment or use comments for reprisals – all employee comments are and must remain anonymous.

## STEP 2: INTERPRETING YOUR EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS

The purpose of this stage of the process is to build on your review of the survey findings and help you develop a coherent “picture” of how your workforce is thinking and feeling. You should start recording your reactions now, both so you can share them with other members of the analysis team and to use in the next phase of planning. For assistance here, we think it’s best to use the “SOCQ” model to categorize your findings.

### USING THE “SOCQ” MODEL

To help make sense of your employee survey findings, you need to identify the themes, patterns and issues that will guide your action planning. This is the “What does it mean?” stage of the process. Thoroughly reviewing your survey findings in a clear and consistent way is a critical first step to setting priorities for action.



The SOCQ model is a useful way to organize your employee survey findings by identifying:

### Strengths

- Your organization's top scores and top comparative scores

### Opportunities for Improvement

- Your organization's lowest scores and lowest comparative scores

### Context

- Separate from your survey findings, these are the factors unique to your organization, such as a recent reorganization or change in strategic direction or even a RIF, that may be affecting your employees' attitudes, whether positively or negatively (or both!)

### Quick wins, easy fixes or “do it nows”

- These are any obvious changes or improvements that are easy to implement and could have an immediate impact on employee satisfaction or morale

Let's now look at each one of these categories in detail.

## Strengths

When reviewing any set of survey data, it's important not to dwell exclusively on the negative results. You also need to note those key areas where your scores are particularly high. In fact, it's just as important to know what your employees value most about working at your organization as it is to learn where you have room for improvement.

You can make use of these current strengths in a number of ways, including identifying:

*“Wins” that you can and should share and celebrate (you weren't going to just share what needs to be changed, were you?)*

*Potential solutions for improving weaknesses (how can you leverage your current strengths?)*

*Possible “internal best practices” (maybe someone else would like to know how the high scorers achieved their results, so they could emulate that success?)*



Here are a few tools for helping you identify your organizations' strengths:

- What stands out for you in a positive way from the overall results?
- Which are the top 5 items with the highest scores overall?
- Which are the top 5 items with the highest scores within each of the 4Cs?
- Which items have the highest scores compared to the industry norms?
- Which items do you rate well on in the Motivations & Drivers analysis?
- If you've completed a prior survey, which items or dimensions have improved most from your last survey?

## Opportunities for Improvement

Listing your organization's weak spots and opportunities for improvement is usually relatively easy. Simply go through your survey results and list every item where the scores are:

- Lower than you'd like them to be;
- Have declined over time;
- Have lots of room for improvement;
- Are critical to your operations or to a specific department's role; and/or
- Are a priority for your organization overall.

In other words, you are seeking out the "red flags" in your organization, especially if they come up in several different places. Some examples that we often see include:

- A lack of employee recognition for their contribution to the organization;
- A sense that "who you know" is much more helpful than "what you know" in getting promotions or professional development;
- Ineffective communications from senior management or between departments;
- Excessive workloads that are leading to burnout; and
- A disconnect between performance and compensation.

Here are some tips for working through this step:

- Which of the Insightlink 4Cs have the most items with the lowest scores?
- Which items have the lowest scores compared to industry norms ratings?
- What are your weaknesses on the Motivations & Drivers analysis?
- If you had a magic wand, what would you do to make this organization an ideal place to work? What would your organization need to do to get there?



## Context

Obviously, you didn't conduct your employee survey in isolation or separate from all of the other developments at your organization. As you work on understanding and interpreting your survey findings, you also need to acknowledge the other factors that could be influencing your findings.

Here you should be asking questions like:

What is your overall business environment and how has your organization changed in the past 12 months?

What recent changes, positive or negative, at your organization might be impacting your employees' attitudes?

What upcoming plans or events might influence your action planning (independent of the survey findings)?

In the survey results, are there any findings that you really didn't expect? Are there other surprises or concerns?

From your review of the quantitative survey results and your employees' written comments, it can also be valuable to identify your organizations existing practices, processes and operations that support your desired work environment and culture and that those that hinder your desired work environment and culture.

These can include how well defined your employees' roles and responsibilities are, whether they receive recognition on a regular basis and how they feel about your performance review practices. Clearly, you'll want to optimize the existing factors that support where you want to go and minimize or work to eliminate those that don't.

## Quick Fixes/"Do It Nows"

Employees participate in employee surveys with the strong expectation that their opinions and attitudes will be taken seriously and that organizational change will occur as a direct result of the survey. They want to see action taken on the issues and opportunities they care about.

What better way could you start fulfilling this expectation than by making changes you can act on right away? These may be simple fixes – like adding more chairs in the employees' lunch room, improving the lights in the parking lot, updating your internal email or phone list – but they can have an immediate positive impact on employee morale, especially if you directly attribute the changes to feedback you received from the employee survey.



## STEP 3: GOAL SETTING AND ACTION PLANNING

Once you have identified your organization's strengths and areas for improvement, you need to plan how your organization is going to respond to this information. This is the "What are we going to do about it?" stage of the process. In other words, it's time to conduct your action planning.

The objective of action planning is to make improvements in your current work environment and people practices so that you can close the gap between where you are today and where you want to be in the next 2 to 3 years. Improving overall job satisfaction and addressing the key opportunities for improvement are critical to the success of this goal.

### KEY GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL PLANNING

Since the process of action planning always involves many moving pieces, it's important to designate someone responsible for coordinating the entire process (the "Action Planning Coordinator") and, if feasible, an owner or coordinator for each of the major issues identified in the employee survey.

Prioritize which of the areas for improvement you plan to target. It is generally best to choose a few key issues to fix (3 to 4 items) rather than trying to tackle too many at once. Limiting the number of action item priorities will help ensure that each one is managed effectively and will avoid spreading your action planning resources too thinly. If, because of budgetary restraints or other limits, you are unable to work on an issue that you know is important to your employees, proactively acknowledge this limitation and the reasons why. Also, if possible, commit to a timeframe for addressing this particular issue.

Decide on the process. Will the items on the improvement list be handled at the executive level, within HR or via task forces/committees or through some combination of these? Match the approach to the culture of your organization and type of change that needs to be made. Keep in mind, though, that no one and/or no team should be responsible for managing an action item if making worthwhile recommendations or suggestions is beyond their authority.

Finally, set definitive goals for each change that you intend to make and who is responsible for achieving each goal. Together, specifying your goals and establishing accountability maximizes the chance of success and lets you and your organization determine how well progress is being made.

In short, your primary goal at all stages of the process should be to create an **"Action Plan"** and not an **"Intention Plan."**



## “Cascade” The Action Planning Process

Senior management and HR should take the lead in identifying the critical issues that need to be addressed across the organization, for example, improving communications within the organization as a whole or specifically between departments or implementing an effective pay-for-performance program.

However, action planning is best carried out both at the corporate level and at the departmental or divisional level, as each department or division is likely to have some unique challenges that are not shared across the organization. Some possible examples could be poor lighting in the warehouse, a lack of project information between shifts in Production, a lack of documentation of changes at IT and a lack of accessibility to supervisors or managers in the Customer Service Department.

Ultimately, the action plans developed within each department or division should be coordinated with the action plan produced at the organizational level to ensure that everyone is moving in the same direction and that all action is designed to support the organization’s primary goals.

Here are the main steps of an effective action planning process:

1. Identify your action priorities;
2. Set clear and specific goals for improvement in each major priority;
3. Summarize each specific goal and analyze it using the S.M.A.R.T. model; and
4. Create your action plan by listing the specific action items required to meet each goal, including timelines and those responsible for implementing each item.

### IDENTIFY YOUR ACTION PRIORITIES

Once you have your list of possible weaknesses and opportunities (see Step 2: Interpreting), think about how those things are related – to each other, to root causes and to possible actions you might take to improve. In particular, are some of the weaknesses you identified related in terms of having the same cause?

For example, a recent round of layoffs/downsizing could produce low scores in both “how committed I feel the organization is to me as an employee” and “I feel secure in my position.” As you carefully work through your list, think about other possible survey measures that might go up or down due to the same cause.

Sometimes, though, things on your priorities list may be related to each other because one is a “cause” measure and one is an “effect” measure.



Remember that the 4Cs survey deliberately includes both overall “effect” measures (e.g., overall job satisfaction and overall satisfaction with communications or compensation) as well as more specific and diagnostic or “cause” measurements within each of these topics. For example, a low score for “overall satisfaction with communications” is a potential effect of low satisfaction with communications to/from senior management.

Typically, in action planning, we design interventions to alter the specific “cause” measures because we know that improvement in these specific areas also often leads to improvement in the broader “effect” measures. Try to identify which items on your list are “cause” rather than “effect” measures because you’ll be designing action to improve those “cause” factors.

Some things on your list may be more inherently actionable than others. These other priorities might require action that is outside a department’s or your organization’s ability to control in the short- to mid-term. For example, serious concerns regarding compensation may be too challenging to tackle right now (other than acknowledging to your employees that you realize the problem exists). Alternatively, a department manager may have a lot of control over *how* organizational policies and processes are implemented, but less control over *what* policies are in place.

For this reason, we recommend sorting your list into two categories:

**“We can fix these” and “We need to live with it (at least for now).”**

Using the “we can fix these” criteria, your list should now include only things that you can control/influence and you should also have identified and understand the relevant cause/effect relationships. So now it’s time to prioritize.

Go through your list of weaknesses/opportunities and give highest priority to:

- Potential changes that can have far-reaching effects, i.e., if there are big issues with immediate supervisors, improving the skills/behaviors of these employees may have a broad positive impact on many of your other survey measurements.
- Areas that are critical to organizational or departmental operations. If you are for safety and you have a lousy score for “attention to safety,” that item better be on your to-do list!
- Low-hanging fruit. If the potential change to improve a low score is obvious, low-cost and/or low effort, there is really no excuse for not getting it done.

At this stage, you should have a short list of priorities for action. Now is the time to set clear and specific goals for each one.



## SET CLEAR AND SPECIFIC GOALS FOR EACH ACTION ITEM

Goal setting is critical to successful action planning, since effective plans cannot be established without knowing the end result you want to achieve. In deciding what goals to set for your organization or your department/unit, ask yourself:

- What resources do you have available to solve the issue?
- How long will it take to correct the issue?
- How will implementation of the proposed solution provide value to your employees?

It is also important to acknowledge and record desirable goals that cannot be tackled within the foreseeable future and to inform employees of the reasons why these goals are not being addressed at this time.

One very helpful tool is to visualize the future state by envisioning success. What will it look like when you have highly committed employees? Desired culture? Effective leadership? Effective communications? And competitive total compensation?

To help you with this visualization, stop and think about what the change might look like. To get to the desired improvements, will there need to be:

Changes in attitudes, beliefs, patterns of thought?

Changes in practices, policies, processes?

Changes in behavior in how things get done and how people approach doing them?

Differences in tools, equipment, physical surroundings, other resources?

Differences in training, hiring?

With the changes visualized, you can now identify leverage points, which are the actual initiatives you will carry out. A simple definition of an initiative/intervention is “Someone (a person or an organization) doing something to someone/something else (a person/group/organization or object) to achieve a clearly-identified goal.” For example, “All supervisors will conduct individual discussions with each of their employees regarding the employee’s recent performance and longer-term career goals no less than once per quarter.”

You should be able to create one or more of these “intervention sentences” for each of the action priorities you have identified. All goals and/or initiatives that you identify need to be assessed against the S.M.A.R.T. criteria to ensure that they are viable and worthwhile.



The S.M.A.R.T. model is a great goal-setting framework, in which each goal is:

**S** = Specific

**M** = Measurable

**A** = Attainable, Achievable and Agreed-Upon

**R** = Realistic

**T** = Time-Based

The best way to get in the habit of making S.M.A.R.T. goals is to practice using them. Here are a couple of examples:

*“Within the next six months, every employee will have a clear and complete written job description that closely corresponds to their actual day-to-day duties.”*

*“By August 15th, we will complete a map of interdepartmental communications flows, needs and bottlenecks and designate ‘key communicators’ in each work group to resolve the bottlenecks.”*

There are a number of tools, processes and techniques that you may use as part of your action planning and implementation. The particular ones you use should depend on the culture of your organization and the nature of the changes you wish to make. Here are some approaches that our clients often find useful.

### **Creating Task Forces to Address Specific Challenges**

Task Forces can be a very effective method for both designing and implementing action plans. Depending on the nature and scope of the priorities you have identified, you will most likely need people besides yourself to create meaningful action steps for each priority and to see those steps through to completion.

Action planning task forces will help you not only work toward resolving your priorities, they will also let you directly involve employees who are passionate about certain opportunities play a meaningful role in finding solutions and, in turn, improving their work environment.



## Creating an action planning task force...

- Enables you to spread the effort across enough people that the change gets accomplished without too much impact on their other work;
- Capture the value of different people’s experiences and point of view (“none of us is as smart as all of us”); and
- Get visibility and “buy in” for the change across the organization.

The goal is for task force members to work together as a team over a few months to (1) create an action plan, including specific action items designed to address the key opportunities, (2) share the plan with all employees at the organization/department, (3) work to implement each of the action items, including monitoring the progress of each item and (4) help to assess success for each action item at the end of the process.

Review your action priorities and think about whether they might best be accomplished by a single task force or if there should be separate task forces working on each one. The best reasons for using a single task force include:

- Your identified priorities are closely related;
- It is much easier to manage/monitor the activities of a single group;
- There are only a small number of people with skills/time/energy/enthusiasm for this effort; and
- This planning effort relates to an issue/action specifically related to one group/department.

On the other hand, multiple task forces are called for when:

- Your identified priorities are very different from each other;
- Task force participation can be spread over more people, increasing buy-in for the effort;
- A number of employees want to get involved; and
- This planning effort relates to an issue/action that will likely affect the organization as a whole.

Whether you form a single task force or multiple task forces, think about the size and composition of the group:

- What size is ideal? If your task forces are too small, they may not have the time/energy/diversity of skills and opinions to do their job well but, if they are too big, they may be too unwieldy to run or manage effectively and could fall short of their goal; and
- Who should be on the task force? Skills/knowledge? Personality? Opinion leaders? Range of levels, job roles, backgrounds, locations?



You also need to think about what you expect from the task force. For example,

- How often/regularly and where will they meet?
- How will they report back? Make recommendations?
- Will they need a budget? Other resources? Ways to request these things?
- What will they be authorized to do?
- Are they also responsible for implementation? To what extent?

The anticipated time commitment from task force members is typically about 5 hours per month over about 3 to 6 months. Also, keep in mind that task forces, especially if they are diverse in composition, may need some time and effort to work well. They may well experience the classic four stages of team development, which are:

- **Forming** – this stage includes the initial “meet and greet” when the team learns about the issues they will be tackling and starts setting goals. Team members tend to act very independently at this stage as they have not yet bonded as a team.
- **Storming** – this is the second stage where the team starts to learn about each other’s working styles, attempt to establish themselves relative to the other members and need to begin to gain each other’s trust.
- **Norming** – at this stage, team members begin to resolve their differences, appreciate each other’s strengths and take on the responsibility of working together to meet the team’s goals.
- **Performing** – finally, all team members are motivated to achieve success and are able to manage conflict, make decisions effectively and act cooperatively with a shared vision.

## Hold Action Planning Meetings

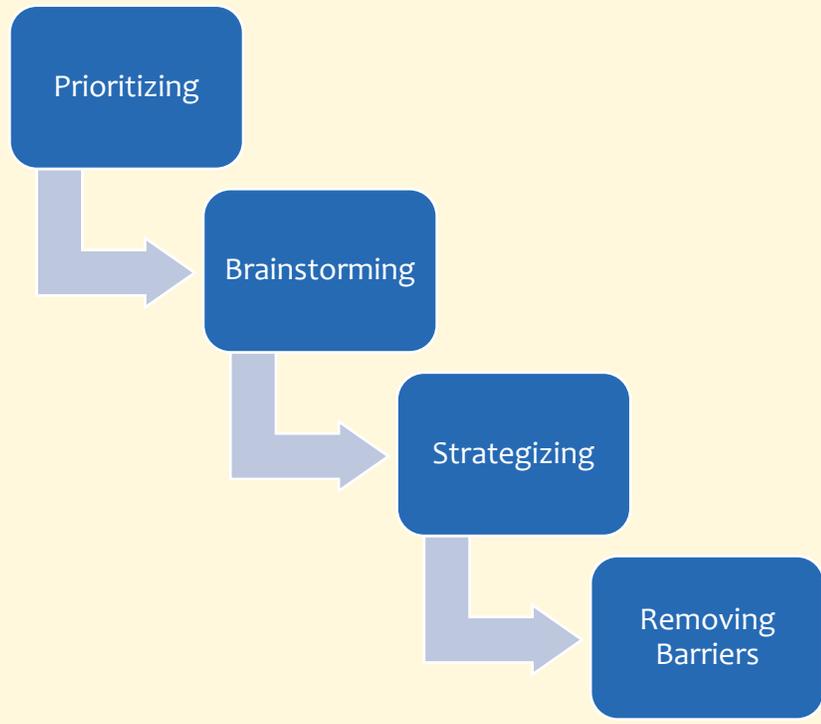
Action planning meetings are a great way achieve two critical objectives – (1) setting clearly-defined goals and (2) deciding which key action items will best meet those goals. You, a task force leader or an assigned facilitator can be responsible for facilitating your action planning meetings.

The facilitator should be competent in setting the context based on the employee survey results, incorporating the ideas for improvement from employees, managing the meeting process, and integrating employees’ ideas with those produced by other departments or in conjunction with corporate initiatives.

All facilitators need to have terrific listening skills and must show great empathy and flexibility in managing the process. Facilitators should also not have a personal agenda regarding the outcome of the meeting.



Here are four great tools for getting the most from you action planning meetings:



### Prioritizing

During prioritization, the task force or team should:

- Determine the most important 4 to 5 things to work on;
- Define the short, medium and longer-term objectives;
- Identify quick wins or easy fixes; and
- Focus on things that are within the team’s control or influence.

Implementing “quick wins” can send a clear message to employees that the organization is committed to taking action based on the survey results. Here are some examples of possible quick wins or easy fixes:

Task	Task Owner	Completion Date	Status	Comments
Have weekly project meetings with frontline employees	Supervisor	Immediate	Ongoing	Meeting on Wed. at 8:30 a.m. scheduled on team calendar



Task	Task Owner	Completion Date	Status	Comments
Improve office ergonomics, replace old chairs and improve lighting	Department manager	August 1	In progress	Submitted purchase order, waiting for approval
Schedule monthly brown bag meetings, invite speakers from other departments or industry leaders to share knowledge and trends with employees	Operations manager	September 15	In progress	Soliciting input from employees about topics of interest

## Brainstorming

During brainstorming, you want to encourage diverse ideas and should not censor any suggestions. Record all the ideas and potential solutions on flip charts. Some sample questions you might want to ask during the brainstorming phase include:

- For each high scoring area, what do we need to do to continue to have high scores in these areas?
- What practical areas are most in need of attention in order to improve our organization? What are your suggestions for solutions?
- What are the most important longer-term problems and what can be done to improve them in the short-, medium- and long-term?

## Strategizing

During strategizing, you evaluate the suggestions or solutions offered and decide how to implement these solutions. Some questions you might want to ask include:

- What specific action will be taken and how easy or difficult will it be?
- If appropriate, how will this improvement impact other business processes?
- What is the cost and time horizon if we implement each of the possible solutions?
- What outcome or outcomes are we expecting to see?
- How will we know if we have been successful?



## Removing Barriers

In addition to generating suggestions for solution to problems, you need to identify potential barriers to implementing these solutions. Potential questions to help remove barriers include:

- Do we have the resources internally to implement these changes? Or do we need to get external resources to implement these improvements?
- Who will do it? Do they have sufficient authority to make these changes?
- Are there any barriers to successfully implementing these solutions (e.g., IT platform, government regulations, insufficient skill sets, etc.)?

## MANAGE TIME, RESOURCES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It will probably take several meetings to develop the appropriate action plans to address the key issues identified in the employee survey findings. It is important that you do not to rush the planning process but you also need to keep the process moving forward so that you don't lose momentum.

It is extremely important to record your plan in writing or in some form of electronic file since you do not want it to become an "Intention" plan rather than an "Action" plan. You also need to keep the relevant employees informed of the progress of each action item because this will send the message that the task force is committed to addressing the opportunities for improvement and achieving success.

## Two Great Tools for Getting Additional Employee Feedback

If, as part of your action planning process, you find that you need more detailed information from your employees or need some help in identifying the cause of a problem and some possible solutions, there are two highly effective employee feedback tools worth considering:

1. **Information Exchange Sessions** – these sessions can be useful if you are seeking a broad range of ideas or input from a fairly large group. They are great if you want to inform your employees of some of the survey highlights in order to spur discussion of possible "macro" ways to improve the organization's work environment.
2. **Employee Focus Groups** – these "focused" meetings are one of the best tools available to help get additional input and ideas on one or two particular topics of interest. A moderator will lead each group on a guided discussion to identify potential sources of critical issues and possible solutions.



It's important to note that Information Exchange Sessions are quite different from employee survey focus groups:

- Information Exchange Sessions tend to be more formal meetings with a larger number of employees. The primary objective is both to share the main findings of your employee survey and, just as importantly, to provide an open forum to hear their thoughts, reactions and suggestions, although without the ability to “dig deeper” that focus groups offer.
- Employee Focus Groups tend to be more informal discussions with a smaller number of employees (8 to 10 ideally). These employees have usually been asked to review specific survey findings prior to the discussion so that they are prepared to talk about the root causes and implications of the results. Focus groups are typically designed to discuss and propose solutions to a limited number of issues.

### Information Exchange Sessions

The purpose of Information Exchange Sessions is to help either senior management (especially in smaller organizations) or department/unit managers to review the organization's most important employee survey results and to get input from employees with setting priorities for action and possible solutions. Depending on the size of the organization, senior management, designated Human Resources personnel, managers and/or department heads should facilitate these meetings.

The leader of each session should be responsible for:

- Creating a Highlight Summary Presentation to share with the employees attending the session – depending on the overall goal of the session, this may briefly cover all of the main topics in the survey or may provide detail only on the topics to be explored in the session.
- Scheduling the session, booking an appropriate meeting venue and inviting the attendees.
- Establishing the purpose of the meeting, inviting employees to be honest but respectful in their feedback and then starting the session by reviewing the summary presentation.
- Encouraging employees to participate in finding solutions to areas of improvement, whether at the appropriate times during the presentation or holding discussion until the end of the presentation.

Depending on the number of employees in a department, it may be wise to have just one big meeting or to schedule a series of meetings to accommodate employees' work schedules or to manage the group size.



For each Information Exchange Session, we recommend spending about 30 minutes on the survey debriefing and the same amount of time for follow-up discussion, including questions and answers. If you have a bigger group or audience, you are likely to get more Q&As, so you may need to add another 15 to 20 minutes to the session.

Model positive behaviors by using positive and exploratory language and maintain a relaxed meeting atmosphere by making eye contact with employees and using humor during the session.

Promote a relaxed atmosphere where all employees feel included. For example:

- Thank employees for their participation in the employee survey;
- Validate survey data by sharing the total number of employees who completed the survey and the response rate;
- Use positive language to uncover possibilities and respect employees' suggestions;
- Use excellent listening skills;
- Focus on what can be done to improve the future;
- Refrain from taking things personally. Try not to over-react to negative feedback, become defensive or uncomfortable. At the same time, though, don't try to explain away low scores;
- Remember that you don't have to respond to everything or know all the answers. Promise to get back to employees with a response to more difficult issues or questions and be sure to follow through; and
- Emphasize that the survey process is intended to create a stronger organization and department, so "all news is good news" because it helps direct attention to areas where attention is needed most.

## Tips for Conducting Successful Information Exchange Sessions

When conducting Information Exchange Sessions, the language you use can communicate a lot to employees, whether you realize it or not. The following examples suggest "dos" and "don'ts" to consider when sharing and discussing employee survey findings with employees.

Say this:

*"Even though I might wish some scores were higher, I know we have to take an honest look in order to improve."*

*"It's useful to know how many of us really feel about this aspect of our work."*

*"Help me understand these scores."*



*“What might be the reasons for these results?”*

*“If this problem didn’t exist, what would our operation look like?”*

*“Let’s talk about how we can be better in this area.”*

Don’t say:

*“I don’t know why this score is so low. I think we’ve done a lot for you people in this area.”*

*“I think we were really busy when the survey came out so that’s why we got that score. I don’t think it means anything about how people really feel.”*

*“What’s wrong with the way we do things?”*

*“I think I know who said this.”*

## **Employee Focus Groups**

The primary benefits of Employee Focus Groups include:

- Getting additional clarity to specific survey results;
- Understanding the root causes of underlying problems;
- Hearing suggestions for improvements from those who live with these key issues day-to-day; and
- Determining and prioritizing the opportunities by determining what changes your employees believe are likely to have the most impact.

When putting together Employee Focus Groups, it’s important to select participants who adequately represent your employee population. You should plan to conduct a minimum of two focus group sessions for every specific topic you want to cover.

Each group should include about 8 to 10 employees and it’s smart to schedule the group to last 1-1/2 to 2 hours, in order to give adequate time to have a full discussion and to hear everyone’s viewpoint.

Many organizations encourage individual departments, teams or sites to conduct their own focus groups as they work to develop their unit-level action plans. In addition, it may be useful for senior leaders to request their own focus groups on topics that affect the organization as a whole.

Ask for the **Insightlink Guide to Conducting Employee Focus Groups** for more information about how to best to implement this critical employee feedback tool.



## STEP 4: FINALIZE, COMMUNICATE AND IMPLEMENT PLANS

Once you or the task force(s) have identified the goals to be tackled, combined with the action items required to achieve those goals, it is essential to create a formal action plan. This is the "Getting results" stage of the process.

All employee survey action plans should include:

- **Completion Target Date** – give yourself enough time to achieve the goals, but without taking too much time so as to negatively affect performance.
- **Responsibility** – every action item should have an “owner” who is accountable for the outcomes and the final results.
- **Updating** – publish the goals and update progress periodically to increase accountability and energize your employees and recognize that circumstances may require you to change your timeline because of new discoveries or identified barriers.
- **Sharing Best Practices** – learn from your colleagues what has worked well or not so well when implementing their action plans.

Accountability is one of the most crucial ingredients when implementing action plans – without it, little or no organizational change will occur. In addition, employees often experience a sense of chaos and uncertainty when the organization makes notable changes to its current systems and practices, even when trying to improve the general work environment. For these reasons, it is critical that you develop a communications strategy for your organizational-level action plan and designate a person responsible for implementing this strategy.

You need to keep employees and all stakeholders informed of the progress of changes and what these changes mean to them personally. Make use of technology and post progress updates or milestone achievements on your organization intranet or in your newsletter, while being careful not to overwhelm your employees with too many emails or posts.

### SHARING ACTION PLANS

Sharing your action plans and progress (with or without highlights of your survey findings) is a critical element in making positive workplace changes. You need to effectively communicate what changes will be happening and when.

If your employees have no awareness or visibility into the action planning process, they may easily assume that nothing is being done to address the issues they raised by responding to the survey. This is not a desirable outcome because it could negatively impact their willingness to participate in future surveys.



When you think about sharing, you need to consider several issues:

- The audience(s);
- What you want each audience to know, feel or do as a result of having the information shared with them;
- Content, form, format; and
- Frequency/timing.

The different types of audiences you should consider include:

- The employees who participated in the survey;
- The task force or departments charged with making changes;
- Anyone whose assistance is needed to carry out the action plan; and
- Senior managers interested/vested in the action plan and the results.

An integral part of implementing organizational action plans is that you are asking people to change themselves and/or aspects of their workplace. For this to be successful, you need their input, cooperation, effort, buy-in and support and you can't get these things if they don't know (and, to some degree, agree with) what is going on.

As you plan how to share your action plans, you need to think about what you want each audience to know, feel or do as a result of seeing the information. For example, do you want your audience:

To know facts that they didn't know before? Such as numbers, opinions or trends?

To change how they feel? Such as feeling proud, concerned or inspired?

To do something? Such as make decisions, take action, participate in making changes or alter policies/processes/their own behavior?

Your answers to these questions will help you decide precisely what you will share and how will you share it. Think about if you want to share:

- **Content** – are you sharing facts, survey findings or analysis/interpretation, opinions, plans, progress reports?
- **Completeness** – everything or a summary?
- **Format** – words, pictures, charts?
- **Method** – in writing, via meetings, a combination?

In smaller organizations, it may be feasible for senior management to lead the sharing of action plans, perhaps with the full workforce in attendance. This would be a great way to confirm and demonstrate senior management's commitment to the action planning process.



In larger organizations, though, we recommend that each department's supervisor or department head should hold an initial meeting with their employees to present and discuss both the organization-level action plan and any departmental-specific plans.

These meetings should focus on three simple topics:

- The actions to be taken immediately and by who is leading them;
- What will be done in the medium- and long-term, including the parties responsible; and
- Important improvement opportunities that cannot be implemented now (at least over the short term) and the reasons why the organization cannot address these issues at this time.

As you and/or your task forces begin to implement the change initiatives, communication becomes even more critical and your employees will want to know:

- Exactly what they are being asked to do, or do differently;
- The rationale for the changes;
- (If appropriate) what new policies, procedures, equipment they are being asked to follow, understand or use;
- What training or resources will be provided to help them make the change;
- What sort of timeline is expected for the change to be implemented; and
- How the change will be measured.

As the implementation process unfolds and change takes place, you should send periodic updates to employees regarding the status of the action plan items. This communication will lend additional credibility to the survey process by reminding employees that the ideas, suggestions and concerns they expressed through the survey were clearly heard and are being acted upon. Just as important, this periodic communication will increase the accountability of those responsible for carrying out the action plans.

Such communication can take place in employee newsletters or special communications devoted to the employee survey. Employee surveys are intended to be a catalyst for continuous improvement and communication. As a result, progress reports should appear regularly in publications and on meeting agendas. At this stage, you need to decide how often each of your audiences needs to be kept in the loop. Should you be sharing updates:

- At designated regular intervals?
- Whenever there's "news"?
- When some stage or process is complete?



It is essential that employees recognize the value of participating in the survey through these interim reports and, even more importantly, through recognized improvements implemented as a direct result of the feedback, thoughts and opinions they provided.

## TIPS FOR SUCCESSFULLY CARRYING OUT CHANGE INITIATIVES

Do not simply delegate the implementation to others and disengage from the process. The key stakeholders must be involved every step of the way.

Move the change initiatives forward. This usually means that the individuals and committees tasked with making changes have meetings/deadlines to help things from bogging down and allow any needed course corrections as the changes are implemented.

Hold “update” meetings throughout the year to report on progress to your employees and to help keep the lines of communications open. Make sure you alert your employees to planned changes and solicit their input/feedback/reactions when needed.

Show your continuous commitment to improving employee satisfaction and engagement, but recognize that changes do not happen overnight. Let your employees know that you are listening to them and acting on their feedback.

Whenever possible, tie the actions you take back to the findings of the survey.

It’s much better to communicate too early/too often than too little/too late.

## STEP 5: MEASURING RESULTS AND CELEBRATING SUCCESS

You can monitor and quantify the progress and success of the action plan by measuring employee perceptions of the changes within the organization. Typically, this is achieved primarily through a follow-up, “post-wave” employee survey, instituted around 12 to 18 months following your original benchmark.

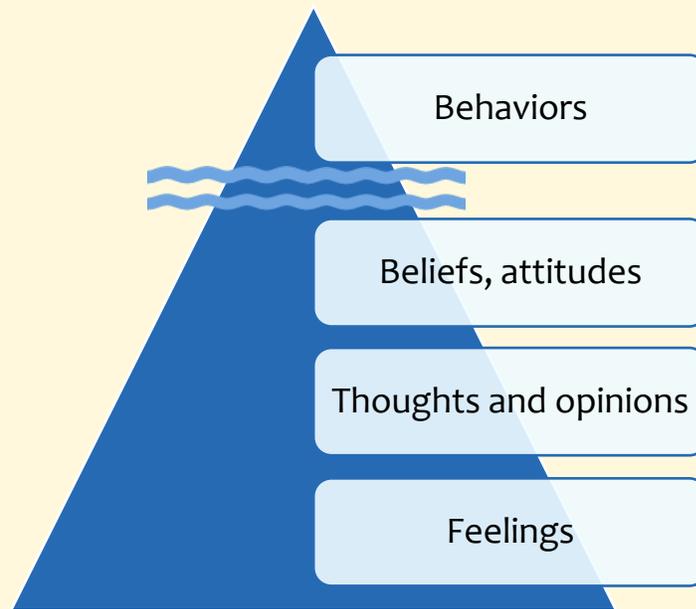
The follow-up survey, though, should not be your only source for monitoring change within your organization. Remember that you also need to assess the success of individual initiatives prior to any follow-up survey. When developing your yardsticks of success, think about:

- What measurements will you need to make?
- How often?
- Who you will collect information from?
- How you will get the information (and what sort of resources/effort will be required to get it?)



The "M" and "T" parts of the S.M.A.R.T. goals are critical here. Be sure you have decided how you are going to measure progress toward each goal, when the measurements will occur and when you expect the overall goal (and any sub-goals along the way) to be achieved.

As you identify which measurements to use against which initiatives, remember that changes to a work environment usually involve changing some aspect of the human experience. It can help to imagine an “iceberg” model, with employee behaviors visible above the surface but with the knowledge that most behavior is influenced by beliefs and attitudes, thoughts and opinions and, importantly, feelings that are beneath the surface, so not as easy to see:



Behaviors are relatively easy to measure because you can see them through direct observation and by asking about them. Some of the options for measuring behavior change are by:

- Counting the number of times the behavior occurs or doesn't occur;
- Asking others (customers, co-workers, supervisors, vendors) if or how often the behavior occurs or doesn't occur; and
- Asking employees themselves if/how often they do or don't do something.

In terms of beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, opinions and feelings, unfortunately, there isn't a way to directly measure what's inside people's heads. Instead, to measure changes in these areas, you can:

- Ask employees themselves about them, whether in a structured or unstructured way; and/or
- Observe and infer to see how these internal states of mind are being expressed in the workplace.



You will also find that each of your goals may have a different timeline in terms of how quickly progress may be visible or the goal is fully accomplished. This means that you need to choose a measurement frequency that:

- Allows you to see if the change is “on course”;
- Enables you to report and celebrate progress (even if you have a long way left to go); and
- Does not over-tax the ability to collect and utilize data (or the tolerance of those providing the data).

Different goals may require the input of different groups of employees or even people outside the organization. Among those you might include in your measurements are:

- Employees in general
- Those in specific operational or managerial roles
- Co-workers in other departments, work groups or locations
- Direct reports
- Customers or vendors

There are lots of ways to collect information that will help you assess progress toward a particular goal. Some of these include:

- Structured surveys
- Focus groups
- Direct observation
- Talking, asking
- Data your organization already collects

For example, if one of your goals is “Reducing annual employee turnover from 15% to 12% or lower by the end of the next complete fiscal year,” you probably already record the data that would be needed to assess the success of this goal. If another goal is “Ensuring that all work shifts are posted at least two weeks in advance,” you may have to start a system of noting the dates shifts are posted.

As you think about how to measure, remember that measurement takes effort and resources. It can be useful to ask yourself:

- How formal does the measurement need to be? Do we need numbers? Statistics? Or will “qualitative,” evaluative or other less concrete measurements be sufficient?
- How much effort or cost will be required to collect the data?
- How much effort or cost will be required to analyze the data?
- Are there resources required that we don’t already have or have access to?



Throughout the process of implementing your action plan and monitoring its progress, it is important to celebrate when key milestones are reached. Recognize the effort and good work that people put in to make the change happen.

Celebrate results by acknowledging the achievements in your newsletter, on your corporate intranet, etc., or even by having a pizza party within a group, hosted by the task force members. Do not focus solely on problems and challenges, even if there is still further work to be done. Sharing successes and improvements helps to reinforce everyone's efforts and contributions to the process and demonstrates the value that participating in an employee survey can have.

## **PLANNING FOR YOUR FOLLOW-UP EMPLOYEE SURVEY**

The information generated from a follow-up employee survey can help you assess what progress has been made on your priority items and help you continue to understand what truly matters to your employees. This survey can also be used to assess the effectiveness of initiatives undertaken within the organization to address some of the problem areas identified in the initial survey.

Follow-up surveys typically involve a nearly identical set of questions as the benchmark wave, in order to maintain the “trackability” and integrity of the data. Additional question areas can be included without affecting the ability to track your changes. These new questions can cover issues such as your employees' reaction to and the impact of new strategies, initiatives and benefits. Follow-up surveys can also help identify what initiatives may be less successful to date and some possible improvements to make going forward.

Remember that the overall satisfaction score can vary from year to year depending on what you have done with the previous employee survey results and what external factors are impacting your business operations. You can manage employees' expectations by taking concrete and measurable actions to address key issues raised in the employee survey.

Doing so will improve employees' perceptions that you care and you will continue to build trust with your employees. In addition, the follow-up survey can help “close the loop” on the actions already taken while seeking out new opportunities for improvement.

If you need assistance or more information, please reach out to your project manager or contact us at [info@insightlink.com](mailto:info@insightlink.com)

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