

# SEE RESULTS! DON'T DISENGAGE WITH YOUR SURVEYS

Measurement expert Theresa Welbourne recommends quicker, shorter, more frequent surveys to measure employee engagement.



By **Theresa M. Welbourne**

**A**s a researcher and professor who spent many years in academic settings, I was trained to do surveys. I did very long surveys because the more data you get, the more papers you can write.

However, the more questions you ask in employee surveys, the more you irritate employees, managers and leaders. Annual employee surveys, whether you call them an engagement survey or not, simply do not engage. In fact, I would argue that they do a great job of disengaging your work force.

Take a moment to complete the engagement/disengagement profile on the following page: >

Theresa M. Welbourne, Ph.D., is the founder, President and CEO of the measurement consultancy eePulse, Inc., and an adjunct professor of Executive Education at the University of Michigan Business School.

## ENGAGEMENT—DISENGAGEMENT SURVEY PROFILE

QUESTION	ANSWER
How many days was the survey open?	
How many days after the survey did it take for you to see the results?	
If the results you first report are not the complete results (all views of the data, all reports), then multiply the number above by 10.	
How many questions were on your survey?	
How many days did it take for you to give a summary of the survey to your senior leadership team?	
How many days did it take to get results to the managers who have responsibility for doing something with the data?	
How many days did it take to get results to employees?	
How long did it take for the first action to occur in response to the data? (If you do not know the answer to this question, put 500 in the column.)	
<p>Add up all the numbers in the column to the right.</p> <p><b>If your score is between:</b></p> <p><b>0 to 100</b> = You super-engaged your population</p> <p><b>101 to 200</b> = You engaged the employees</p> <p><b>201 to 300</b> = You somewhat engaged the employees</p> <p><b>301 to 500</b> = You irritated the employees</p> <p><b>Over 500</b> = You implemented a disengagement survey</p>	

Some of you are not happy with this diagnostic tool. If you did not know the answer to the last question, then you had to put in 500 points. And if you did that, then your score hit the magic 500-point mark. In other words, you did not even have a chance to get a positive score.

But that is the point! If you or others in your firm are not aware of actions coming out of your annual survey, be it an engagement survey, commitment survey, satisfaction survey or something else, the whole survey process itself is disengaging.

You may be saying “but we did lots of things as the result of the survey; it’s not my fault that no one knows about it!”

Two consultants I worked with a few years ago coined the term “fix and tell.” It went over quite well with the organization we were working with together. I use the words “data and dialogue” to describe what survey gives, leaders and managers *have* to do with data. You need to have conversations with employees.

If you want to move your survey to an engaging process, you have to reconsider all the options. I personally have been using a process I call data- and dialogue-driven leadership. I gave up on writing a lot of papers based on one data collection, and I opted for engaging my audience in a conversation based on fewer but more targeted questions asked more frequently. The data and dialogue method, for me, involves the following:

- Run “pulse” surveys as frequently as weekly, biweekly and monthly.
- Ask two to five questions in each “pulse dialogue” (use this term rather than surveys).
- I make sure that when I hit

## SURVEYS

One-way communication  
Quantitative  
Low or no ROI  
Negative relationship impact

the complete button, all managers obtain results within 24 hours.

- The questions are customized so managers want to take action.
- I provide managers with easy ways to engage in dialogue with the survey data.

As a result of this work—and as I continue to work with clients who do annual surveys—I have been suggesting we evolve our thinking about surveys. Consider surveys and data and dialogue tools as two points on a continuum. Each has its purpose, and they certainly can overlap, but data and dialogue processes are different from the traditional employee survey.

### Surveys:

- One-way communication (you ask questions of the survey respondent).
- Focused on getting a score.
- Primarily uses quantitative data.
- Focused on benchmarking (which means question wording cannot be customized).
- No guarantee that the survey taker's concerns will be voiced.
- There may be no action; company may be content with score alone.
- Focused on survey developer's agenda.
- Negative relationship impact because of lack of response to survey data.

## DIALOGUE

Two-way communication  
Qualitative  
Potential for ROI  
High relationship impact for small groups

### Data and dialogue processes:

- Two-way and interactive communications.
- Focused on getting deep understanding of a situation and then engaging the other party in a dialogue based on an initial conversation or collection of data.
- Score is only used to start the dialogue.
- Not focused on benchmarking; questions are customized.
- Extensive use of qualitative data.
- Guarantee managers will lis-

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ten and engage in dialogue.

- No guarantee that every comment will receive an action.
- Focused on a business agenda and a desire to understand by opening up to employee-focused topics.
- Positive relationship impact because dialogue is highly valued.

If you are truly serious about engaging employees in behaviors that drive organizational excellence, then starting with a survey that disengages may not be the best use of your investment. Question tradi-

## DATA AND DIALOGUE

Interactive dialogue  
Quantitative and qualitative  
Significant and high ROI  
High relationship impact for large groups

tion; try something new; enter the realm where you experiment with new forms of conversation, new metrics, new processes, and then you will find that breaking the mold leads to outstanding results. ■