

## How Are You Using the Data Obtained from Your Employee Engagement Survey?

By *Shelley A. Berg*

*Tales from the Field, a new monthly column, consists of reports of evidence-based performance improvement practice and advice, presented by graduate students, alumni, and faculty of Boise State University's Instructional and Performance Technology department.*

### **The Field – What is an Employee Engagement Survey for?**

Employee engagement is a buzzword we've all heard in the performance improvement and human resource circles. Engaged employees tend to be high-caliber performers who take personal responsibility for working toward the success of the organization. As a result, an organization that enhances engagement within its workforce will likely experience the financial benefits produced by higher levels of quality customer service, teamwork, and productivity. In order to systematically enhance engagement, it must be measured, and the organization must act on the results. Unfortunately, many organizations fail to act on survey results, which can actually lead to negative consequences, such as frustration, disillusionment, and distrust on the part of the employee respondents.

### **An Evaluation Study – How Do They Use Employee Engagement Survey Data?**

SumHealth (a pseudonym being used for confidentiality purposes) is a health insurance company based in the northwest United States. The author conducted her master's thesis research at SumHealth to investigate how the organization uses its employee engagement survey data. SumHealth administers an employee engagement survey annually; however, the actions and benefits that result from the survey's findings are not tracked. Therefore, at the time of this evaluation, the organization could not ascertain whether it was benefiting from this effort. The evaluation was initiated to determine how the organization's frontline leaders were responding to the survey's data, to identify the reasons for those responses, and to make recommendations for how the survey can be used more productively.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data was collected in two phases. The first phase consisted of open-ended, exploratory interviews with frontline leaders and division heads in order to better understand processes, perceptions, and actions related to the employee engagement survey. A second phase of data collection consisted of an online questionnaire completed by frontline leaders to determine the extent to which the findings from the interviews applied to the larger population.

For instance, 66.67% of leaders interviewed indicated that they discuss the results of the engagement survey with their direct reports, and their perceptions of the value of this conversation were mixed. Interview responses also revealed that leaders were taking varying approaches to this discussion. On the questionnaire, 68.66% of leaders reported discussing the results with their direct reports, also with mixed perceptions of the value of this conversation ( $M = 4.57$ , where 1 = "not valuable at all" and 7 = "extremely valuable"). This result from the questionnaire is illustrated in Figure 1. Interestingly, the literature suggests that such a discussion can be quite beneficial (e.g., Rossett, 1999; Smith, 2003). With this in mind, one of the

recommendations from this study was to develop a meeting guide or “meeting-in-a-box” to assist leaders with structuring this discussion more productively.

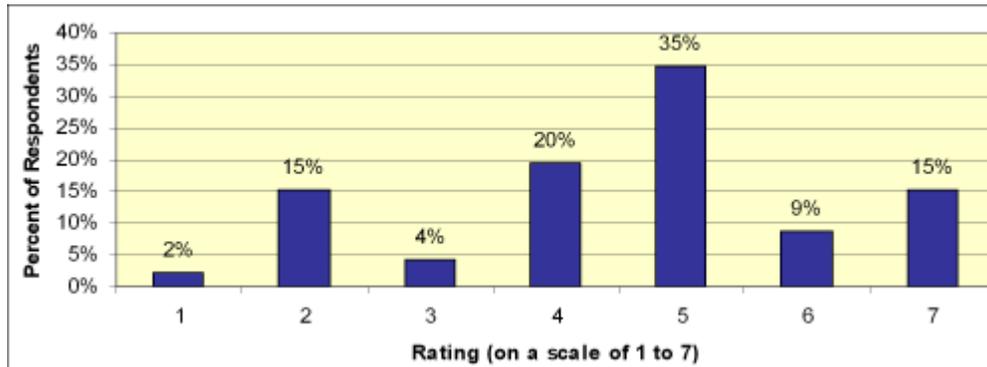


Figure 1. Extent to which discussing the results of the engagement survey with direct reports is a valuable activity ( $N = 46$ ).

### Project Recommendations

The primary recommendation from this evaluation was for SumHealth to create a comprehensive communication plan for their employee engagement initiative, which should include:

- How to communicate the engagement survey results down the organization’s ranks of leaders (as well as what to communicate)
- How leaders should communicate engagement survey results to frontline employees (i.e., non-leadership direct reports)
- Targeted, “actionable” recommendations that can be used to respond to the engagement survey results to enhance engagement within divisions and teams
- A year-round plan for integrating the communication of positive changes resulting from the engagement survey into routine communications throughout the organization

This communication plan should be designed in a way that builds on the perceived benefits of the engagement survey; addresses (and decreases) the perceived barriers to using the engagement survey results; demonstrates the relevance of employee engagement and the survey itself to leaders and their teams; connects the engagement survey to positive change in the organization for employees of all levels; and integrates the topic of engagement into routine communications throughout the year to increase the perception of engagement as an ongoing priority and a core component of SumHealth culture.

### References

Rossett, A. (1999). *First things fast*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Smith, F. J. (2003). *Organizational surveys: The diagnosis and betterment of organizations through their members*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

### Author Bio

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