



THE 2018 GUIDE TO ACTIVATING EMPLOYEE VOICE

A modern approach
for the modern workforce.



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INTRODUCTION

Companies used to give service awards to employees every five years in a top-down fashion, from company execs to employees. Now companies recognize key values and behaviours between peers daily.

Companies used to conduct annual appraisals and set annual goals. Now they are much more agile in the performance management process and are abolishing annual appraisals. Abolishing annual appraisals---alliteration at its best!

Many companies often still conduct annual engagement surveys. The HR world is starting to shift towards an approach with more frequent employee feedback and real-time data and insights for leaders throughout the organization.

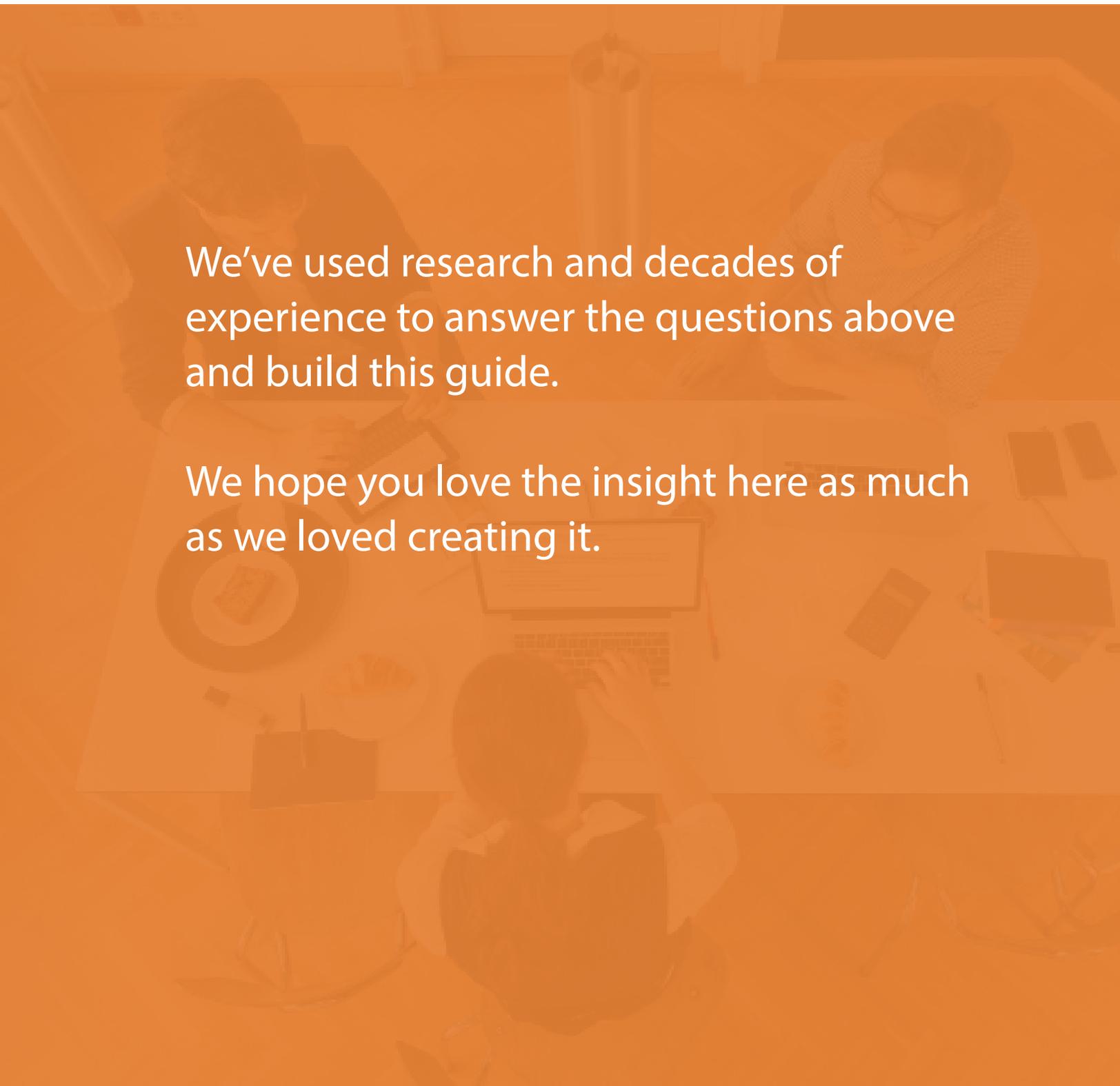
If you read several of the 2018 HR trend articles out there, many focus on two major shifts: 1) in their approach to hearing Employee Voice, which offers the ability for instant feedback, and 2) the value of people analytics in offering insight. Both of these shifts improve employee engagement and increase value for organizations and leaders.

Even though the workforce is rapidly changing and employee expectations are rising, companies are struggling to figure out where to start and how to put together a comprehensive plan to address these important topics, which is exactly why we've published this guide---to help you make progress in your employee engagement strategy.

We've structured this guide to help answer the questions we frequently get from companies:

- Is employee voice all hype? Is it really important?
- How can I make the change to a better employee listening strategy?
- How often should my company do this, and what should I even ask in surveys?

- What are the benefits of doing this?
- How can I get my executives to buy in?
- Isn't this going to be painful and add more work to HR?



We've used research and decades of experience to answer the questions above and build this guide.

We hope you love the insight here as much as we loved creating it.

THE EVOLUTION OF EMPLOYEE VOICE

2018 is another year with increased hype and excitement for the workplace and the HR leader. It's exciting because as an HR community, we have the ability to make more impact on the organization than ever before—and not just on the metrics that matter to HR such as engagement and retention, but also in critical business metrics such as customer satisfaction and profitability.

According to Deloitte's [HR Technology For 2018: Ten Disruptors Ahead](#) publication, Josh Bersin shares:

Feedback, Engagement, And Analytics Tools Reign. Only a few years ago the engagement survey market was a robust but sleepy place. Today it has become a dynamic world of real-time survey systems, sentiment analysis software, organizational network analysis (ONA) tools, and products that actually automatically ask your peers for feedback to give you real-time coaching.ⁱ

It's no secret that feedback tools are growing, giving employees a safe place to provide feedback on the workplace. All signs point to the fact that this isn't a fad, but rather a new reality in our organizations.

In 2015, a Gallup poll revealed that 50.8% of US employees were "not engaged", while 17.2% were "actively disengaged".ⁱⁱ This is a scary thought for the future of our companies. If you think about it, we're constantly striving for greater customer satisfaction and product improvement, so why aren't we giving the same vital attention to our strongest asset—our employees?



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Times are-a-changin’

Our systems are constantly improving to be better and more effective. As mentioned in the introduction, just look at the evolution of years of service and award programs; while employers used to reward employees every five years, based on nothing more than presence, recognition today has greatly progressed with recognition and reward systems working on monthly, weekly, or even daily timeframes and focusing on more specific value-sets and behaviours that inspire employees to grow. This positive progression in recognition and reward systems has resulted in greater employee fulfillment and engagement at work.

The workforce is evolving at an unprecedented rate—and an effective employee listening strategy is key in enabling organizations to adapt quickly in this new world of constant disruption. It’s our duty as business leaders to make positive improvements in the evolution of Employee Voice for the greater success of both employers and employees.

Your employees deserve to feel valued and heard. They deserve to be part of the conversation—a conversation that should ideally take place more than once a year. Not only do they deserve it, they expect it. And when they do have that voice, evidence shows that this positively impacts engagement levels. While annual surveys can give a snapshot overview of the year, employees and the whole company will flourish with more constant communication.

The way we listen to employees and offer a safe place for feedback is changing as well. This is an overview of where the trends are headed:



1. Annual Surveys are being replaced or supplemented

Now, more than ever, it's crucial to continue to engage our employees, yet oftentimes, the way we measure engagement and give employees a voice is outdated.

Quite simply: the annual survey method is inadequate.

It's too infrequent

Imagine facing a challenge in the workplace, and then having to wait 365 days until your concern was addressed. Imagine trying to do your job, day in day out, without feeling like you were being heard or appreciated. Imagine if there were no opportunities for you to give your feedback until the yearly annual survey came around, and then having to wait additional months for any change to begin to take place.

Employees don't work in years and quarters; they work in days and hours. As a result, we must ensure that we're giving them the support that they need. This is why companies are beginning to evolve and either completely remove or supplement the annual engagement survey.

What's more, the annual survey typically isn't representative of the whole year. Think of how difficult it sometimes is to remember what we ate for dinner last night. How much more difficult would it be to recall specific work experiences from six months ago?

As LearnGeek shares in "5 Problems with Employee Engagement Surveys": "It is a lot more likely that we're spending a pile of money to see how employees are feeling about the past few days. The rest of the year could have been amazing, but a bad moment last week could radically shift the feedback for groups of employees."ⁱⁱⁱ

It's Expensive

Traditionally, large consulting firms have owned this process for companies, deploying their army of data scientists, industrial physiologists, and engagement consultants to deliver insights. Today, A.I. powered technology has automated this manual work significantly reducing the cost and complexity for organizations.

It's cumbersome

The annual survey is long and generic, making it both a bland and a convoluted process for your precious employees to have to wrestle through.

When methods are outdated, it doesn't make life any easier on our HR teams. They're the ones who are tasked with the nearly impossible job of sorting through enormous amounts of data to try and somehow measure both the specific and overall sentiment of their employees, determine actionable insights that are valuable for leaders, all typically in tools like Microsoft Excel.

It's inaccurate

As LearnGeek shares in the same article: "Because the survey is constructed and executed without local context, managers are left to interpret the results and figure out how to turn the data into tangible actions. This often results in responses that are too little, too late or off-target due to the local interpretation of the results and related employee needs."^{iv}

While the Annual Survey method was the first progression in the evolution of Employee Voice, updated technology enables us to take leaps and bounds beyond this outdated method.

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Because the survey is constructed and executed without local context, managers are left to interpret the results and figure out how to turn the data into tangible actions.

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2. Employee Pulses had their time

Another recent popular method of gaining employee feedback is through the Employee Pulse. This is a shorter, more focused group of survey questions that can be sent out on a frequent basis, and this flexibility means that the Pulse can potentially be an incredibly effective tool.

When you're able to consistently connect with your employees, you're better able to understand the vibe at work and therefore take more effective measures to ensure that things run smoothly. The trick is to determine and embrace the most efficient means for communication and success.

As an employee, receiving an employee pulse is traditionally an easier experience than a long annual survey, however, there is still room to improve. One problem is that the employee pulse can be repetitive and impersonal, with similar questions every time or a predetermined rotation of questions. This can cause employees to feel like it's a process on autopilot and leave them wondering if leadership is actually listening.

3. Active Listening is where it's at

If you want your employees to feel fully engaged and understood, there is one option that goes above and beyond both the employee pulse and the annual survey. Its modern methods and efficiency offer the most exciting and successful progression in the evolution of Employee Voice. It's the concept of Active Listening.

With the Active Listening approach, employers are able to get a baseline for employees, trend survey results over a period of time, and then ask more tailored specific questions based on actively listening to the results of previous surveys. It is not asking the same questions over and over, but rather fluid questions that pay attention to the employees' responses, generate relevant insights, and inspire action.

Active listening can be complemented by both the annual survey and the Employee Pulse and using all of these tools together can enhance both knowledge and understanding.

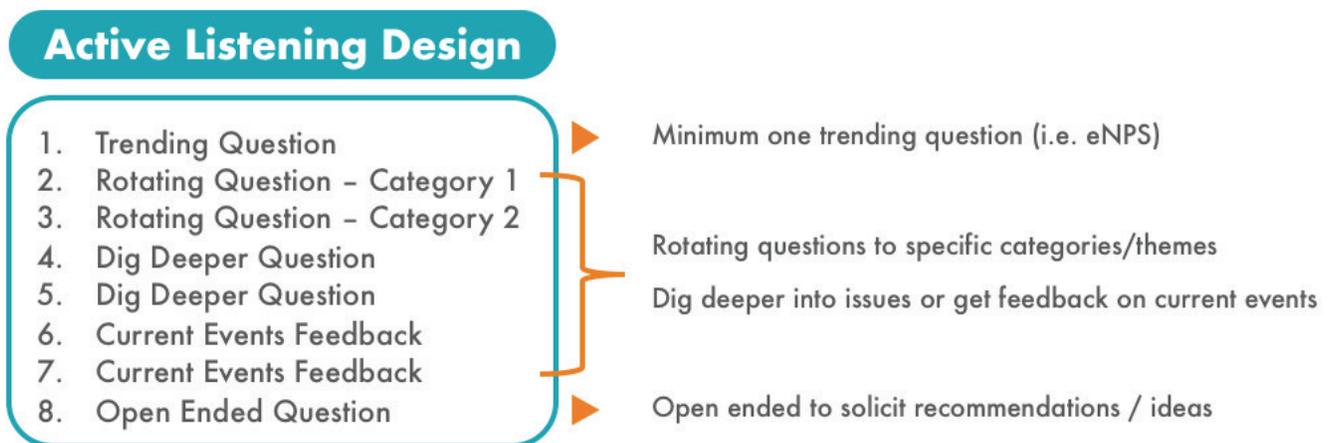
Furthermore, it isn't always about the traditional engagement drivers. Digging into other factors that are relevant to your company and impacting your people, for example, understanding if the company has a

diverse and inclusive culture, should also be part of the mix.

Think about your customers. The most loyal ones are the ones who feel supported, the ones who trust you and enjoy working with you. Why not foster the same level of relationship with your employees? They are, after all, your key to successful customer relations and offering them great products and services, as well as your key to high profitability and company success.

In terms of a structure, Active Listening supports the following:

- Consistent questions on a frequent cadence to gauge and measure employee sentiment over time
- Rotating questions that dive into more specific issues or gaps over time after gaging the sentiment baseline from the key questions tied to main engagement drivers
- Specific questions relevant to the business to get real-time insight and feedback about what's happening in the company today (or going to happen) such as reactions to major announcements or large organizational changes.



It's not only about listening

The key here is to create meaningful experiences and ensure employees know that you're listening and that you care. There's so much more involved in employee engagement than mere data collection, as stated in the White Paper Series:

"The ability to convert data insights into practical and impactful action is a critical area where most companies fall short once data has been collected....Organizations have become very adept at administering surveys and collecting feedback from associates; however, they are less adept at what to do with that information and enabling managers to take meaningful action."

It's about developing relationships through active listening, about nourishing and strengthening those employee-employer relationships, yearly, weekly, daily.

And it doesn't end at Active Listening. Listening is only half the battle, because employee engagement is about a conversation. It's about action. Listen first, and then, armed with those insights, take action.



If you want an idea of what types of 'Employee Voice' initiatives exist out there, check out an article of different ways customers have used the WorkTango platform.

<https://worktango.com/2017/10/29/manyways2worktango/>

FIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR EMPLOYEE VOICE MINDSET AND APPROACH

The workplace is changing---that's not a surprise at all. But while it continues to evolve around us, we continue to use the same approaches. The challenge for our HR departments to recruit, retain and inspire people remains, however, our solutions need to change and evolve. As 2018 continues to offer companies and HR teams access to new insight and technology, we've carefully assessed five effective ways to view the world in regards to improving your Employee Voice strategy.

Approaches this section will cover:

1. Begin to use Consumer Principles with your Employee Strategy
2. Leverage and Embrace New Technologies
3. Make use of Insights, not Data.
4. Be more agile
5. Leverage your secret weapons – your managers

1. Begin to use Consumer Principles with your Employee Strategy

We don't check in with our customers only once a year, nor do we look at our financial data that infrequently. Yet, we often use a stagnant annual or quarterly frequency for listening to our employees.

Embracing the same rigor and focus on employees as we have for consumers is a good way to frame a new approach. There is a parallel between the focus we currently have on customer relationships towards what we should also be having with our employees:

- Customer Engagement efforts should match Employee Engagement efforts and strategy
- We personalize marketing messages to customers and should do the same in employee communications - not a one-size fits all mass communication to employees
- We analyze customers, listen to sentiment of their ratings or messages online, and track activities, which we should do for employees to gather more insight and predictability
- We create loyalty programs for customers but invest little in employee rewards and recognition
- We service and support our customers the best we can so they are repeat customers and should have the same rigor with employees.

We have a lot to learn from how we approach consumers in a sales and marketing sense to how we should be listening to and understanding employees. It's frequent and personal employee dialogue that will make a difference, not a broad-based approach.

What can your company do about it?

Even though we say employees are our most important assets, it's clear that we invest much more in customers than employees. "For every dollar spent on employee feedback, companies spend hundreds of dollars on customer feedback," said Troy Stevenson, former vice president of customer loyalty at eBay, in a recent interview.^{vi} The mindset needs to change.

Five things to consider changing in your approach to engage these new 'consumers' are:

1. **Employee first** – change your HR approach to focus on creating a phenomenal employee experience. Ask yourself how many major initiatives in the last three years were really providing value to employees, versus value predominantly to your HR department (yes, that recent HRIS implementation, too).
2. **Get transformational, not transactional** – if your engagement practices are a set of activities or targets as a result of a survey, then it is reactive and transactional. To be transformational there needs to be a deep belief in the power of people to contribute, and a belief that employees are integral to deliver business strategy.
3. **Your strategy must impact employees daily** – consumers are fickle and expect great products and service, instantly. Your annual initiatives and programs won't work. Think about consumer apps and how it's not a one-size solution and how easy it is to access information.
4. **Engage managers** – managers often get overlooked, but they're employees too. Too often, they're not ready for management and don't have the skill set or the required experience. Make managers part of the process of developing the strategy and enacting it with employees. Enable them by serving people insights directly to them so that they can be more effective leaders and make better people decisions. Front-line managers have more impact on changing the organization positively than senior leaders or executives.
5. **Get 'employee-specific'** – 'one size fits all' doesn't work for consumers, and it won't for employees either. Think about the time you're being mass-marketed to and you ignore it – your employees are no different. There needs to be a genuine interest in the individual employee.

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An example: eNPS

A simple way to get valuable data is with the eNPS question. eNPS stands for “Employee Net Promoter Score”, and it is derived from the famous “Net Promoter Score”^{vii}, which is used for consumers. The question is:

How likely are you to recommend our company to your friends and family?

A variation to this question for employees is:

Would you refer your friend and family to work at our company?

The answer takes the form of a score, from 0 to 10, with 0 being not at all likely, and 10 being extremely likely. You then group your employees into three groups based on their responses:

Promoters (9-10): Employees who love the company and will recommend it to others.

Passives (7-8): Employees who are ambivalent.

Detractors (0-6): Employees who are unhappy and may advise against working with you.

The score is calculated by the equation below which offers a simple and accurate measure of overall employee sentiment into what employees are feeling and thinking.



The magic of this question is that it is reflective of what an employee would *do*, not what they *think* about the company. Asking whether they would recommend the company is a forward-thinking action that is more relevant than how they would rate their experience within the company the last year.

2. Leverage and Embrace New Technologies

We heard recently that “it is an automated world, and HR is just living in it.” However, this can’t be the way we approach our roles and the impact we can have. In fact, we need to be driving technology innovation in our organizations.

When it comes to leveraging technology for the purpose of Employee Voice, there are a few elements to keep in mind:

1. **Custom Insight in Real-time** – Technology needs to offer custom ways to view slices of data relevant to your company and be ready to be served in real-time. Many costly “engagement surveys” are paying for manual manipulation of data when technology and data-science can make this easier and available real-time.
2. **True Anonymity** - Technology without the stringent anonymity thresholds fails to offer employees a safe place in which to generate honest feedback and build trust in the organization.
3. **Trending and Predictive Analytics** - Having data is okay, but it’s not valuable unless it offers real insights, visibility into trends, and ultimately enables you to easily predict how improvements in your people and culture practices can impact improvements in overall engagement.
4. **Serving the right Insights to the right people** - Having data or insights only delivered to HR or executives can have limiting impact on driving action. When

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Many costly “engagement surveys” are paying for manual manipulation of data when technology and data-science can make this easier and have valuable insights offered in real-time.

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you serve data directly to leaders in the organization, you empower them to act and give them permission to take ownership of the engagement within their teams. Modern engagement tools enable you provide role-based access to all people leaders with full control and customization over access limitations.

Don't start with technology but allow it to enable modern approaches.

Think of technology as a "full-circle enabler". It just isn't about making an approach and process easier, but it's about how it enables you to realize your definition of success. As mentioned by Dave Ulrich, "For HR to have a strategic impact, technology is the enabler and the systems are table stakes."^{viii}

But tech in HR isn't anything new. It's not a fad. In 2017 alone, Venture Capitalists invested over \$1.064 Billion in HR technology.^{ix}

Technology and Innovation isn't going anywhere

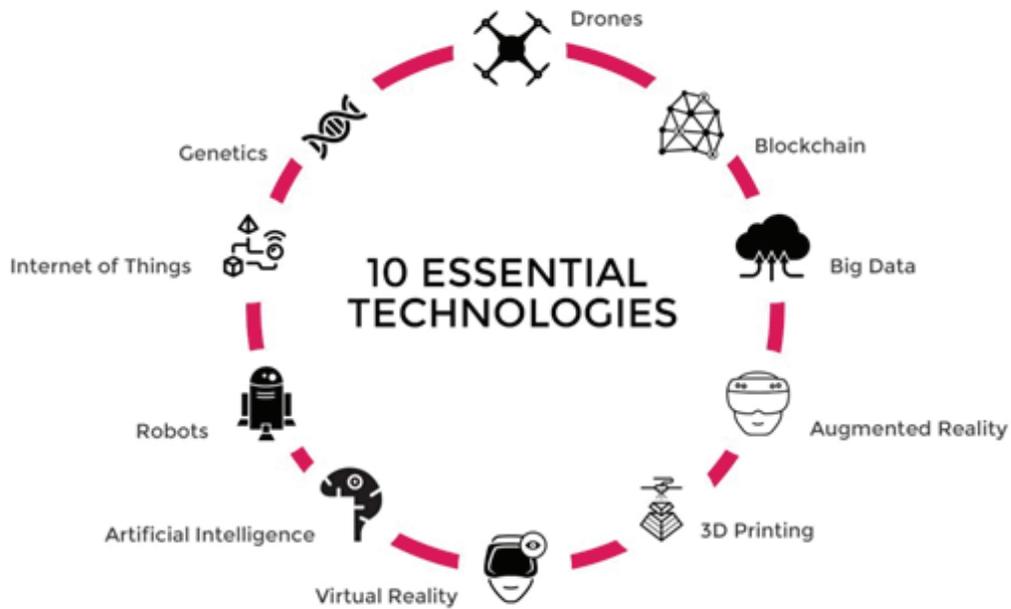
Not only from an Employee Voice perspective, but for all HR Technology, if we look at the future of technology (see the 10 Essential Technologies^x image below) we need to start implementing these new innovations into our strategies.

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“For HR to have a strategic impact, technology is the enabler and the systems are table stakes.”

–Dave Ulrich

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NEXT ECONOMY

If you think about Employee Voice today, companies are leveraging Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to suggest actions, ask better questions, or understand sentiment and themes to open-ended employee comments. Companies are also moving past survey as the only mechanism to collect employee data and leveraging advancements in natural language processing to understand open text data from emails and chat, pulling in new source data from calendars to performance management systems, and leveraging voice and tone analysis. As HR, it's critical that we understand and respect employee privacy and confidentiality when deploying these technologies. With great data come great responsibility!

It's time to stop avoiding change, but rather embrace it.

Not only "live in this world", but drive it.



WorkTango's Employee Voice platform uses Natural Language processing to offer HR and leaders sentiment and themes to help summarize thousands of employee comments and data models to offer predictability to what is the biggest impact that can be made on improving the employee experience..



3. Make use of Insights, not Data.

Companies that embrace modern technology help their leaders uncover actionable insights in real-time and enable them to make better people decisions.

And it's just the beginning: "The increasing adoption of human resources (HR) software has helped streamline the data analytics process and expedite "social connections" by providing management with the speed to act on these real-time and actionable insights."^{xi}

"2017 has seen people analytics arrive "with a vengeance": ... 69% of companies studied have been actively taking steps to improve the way they look at people data, compared to only 10-15% before."^{xii}

If you're not leveraging technology to get a level of insights on your workplace that's based on employees' shared first-hand experiences, it will be difficult to have a pulse on the organization and use data to make overall better people decisions.

4. Be more agile

We have all heard about being more 'agile' in our organizations and tying this concept isn't just limited to software development. The reality is that if we want to have a better pulse on the organization, we have to be more agile in our approach.

Do you know how your employees are feeling this week? If you're one of the rare companies that measure this on a frequent basis (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) then you likely have an idea. If you're doing this quarterly or annually, your insight isn't moving as rapidly as your employees and your workforce are.

Businesses are moving towards constant or regular iterations in most other areas: agile development can result in new releases every week, marketing campaigns are measured daily, and Business

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Intelligence allows organizations to make strategic changes on the fly. In comparison, why is your Employee Voice strategy different?

As stated in an HRZone article: “Organizations and researchers alike are finding that the traditional model of the annual survey just isn’t providing actionable insights anymore.”^{xiii} Think about how quickly your company moves and changes. You need a frequent pulse on understanding what’s on the mind of employees – this ultimately improves engagement and performance.

Industry research is now recommending that organizations employ tools and methods that measure and capture employee feedback and sentiment on a real-time, local basis. As Deloitte shares in an article:

Companies need tools and methods that measure and capture employee feedback and sentiment on a real-time, local basis so they can continuously adjust management practices and the work environment at a local level. These tools include employee feedback systems as well as data analytics systems that help identify and predict factors that create low engagement and retention problems.^{xiv}

We recommend short frequent surveys that will enable you to keep a constant pulse on how people are feeling to equip leaders with a structured flow of insights to have valuable conversations with employees more often.

It’s not just about listening frequency

Being agile isn’t just about more frequent pulses as a way to offer employees a voice. Agile processes are about iterating quickly, doing retrospectives on what’s working well and what isn’t, and acting swiftly on what’s going to change moving forward. It’s also important to get feedback on changes that are impacting your people so that you can respond rapidly.



“Organizations and researchers alike are finding that the traditional model of the annual survey just isn’t providing actionable insights anymore.”



Companies that offer employees a voice more frequently, have the right tools and process to offer that insight in real-time to the right people, and respond to them end up with employees who feel their voice matters and that they're part of shaping change and success in the company. It also helps HR identify and get metric driven around what's working and what isn't and the impact of their strategies.

5. Leverage your secret weapons – your managers

The key to transitioning listening into action is engaging your people leaders. Today, work happens in highly empowered teams; each team is different, with unique needs and challenges.

Here are five ways that will help you engage people leaders in your Employee Voice strategy:

1. **Educate:** Your people leaders need to understand the value of engaged employees. Clearly communicate why engagement is key to retention and team performance. Show leaders why it matters to the organization and how it will impact their performance.
2. **Measure:** Frequently take employee pulse surveys to understand how changes in the business are impacting engagement drivers. Provide people leaders with real time visibility and personal trends.
3. **Empower:** Trust and empower people leaders to come up with initiatives they believe will have the highest impact. This can be having more frequent check-ins with employees, coming up with a development or growth plan, clearly setting goals and expectations with each employee, celebrating successes more often, recognition, or a myriad of other initiatives. Bonus points if you can support them with the right tools.
4. **Accountability:** Engagement and performance on a leader's team is a reflection of their leadership. Hold managers and leaders accountable by including their engagement initiatives and results in their OKRs, goals and performance evaluations.
5. **Results:** Show people leaders how their action is having an impact on their team's engagement and performance. Engagement is an ongoing initiative and should be always-on. Changes in the business will have an ongoing impact and it's on the leaders in your organization to continuously listen, adapt, and act.

The Role of HR to Enable Managers

When it comes to enabling managers, HR plays three major roles in supporting the concept of activating Employee Voice. These roles come into play as your managers interact with this new initiative:

1. **The Advocate** – advocating is a part of the initial launch of any new initiative and through ongoing communication. This includes sharing what impact this can have on leaders and the organization.
2. **The Expert** – for managers that are navigating through receiving feedback from employees on a more regular basis, they may have challenges or require additional information. The role of Expert is important to offer guidance throughout the process.
3. **The Coach** – Some leaders may be stuck when it comes to accepting negative feedback or unsure of how to act accordingly. The Coach is meant to help managers understand and receive feedback and support them in developing actions.



FIVE ways to improve your Employee Voice mindset and approach - Recap:

1. Begin to use Consumer Principles with your Employee Strategy
2. Leverage and Embrace New Technologies
3. Make use of Insights, not Data.
4. Be more agile
5. Leverage your secret weapons – your managers

WHO CARES? WHY EMPLOYEE VOICE MATTERS

As you read this, you likely have been an employee at some point in time. Most employees can reflect on a time when they had a voice in their company and it was considered in organizational or team decisions. We also remember the times when our voices weren't heard, or even worse, heard and then ignored.

As the concept of Employee Voice makes its way deeper into organizations it's also important to remember the benefit it has to leaders, executives, and companies at large.

Nita Clarke co-founded 'Engage for Success' a UK government-led voluntary movement promoting employee engagement as a better way to work that benefits individual employees, teams, and whole organizations. She speaks about how Employee Voice has four main purposes: *"helps organisations to understand the employee attitudes about work, presents a form of collective organisation to management, influences leaders' decisions on work-related issues, and shows the reciprocal nature of the employment relationship."*^{xv}

Helps understand employee attitudes

Presents a collective voice to management

Influences leader decisions

Reciprocal nature of employment relationship

Adopting and amplifying the importance of Employee Voice within an organization supports a greater relationship with employees and the organization, boosts communication, and supports leaders.

Real impact – FOUR Benefits to Activating Employee Voice

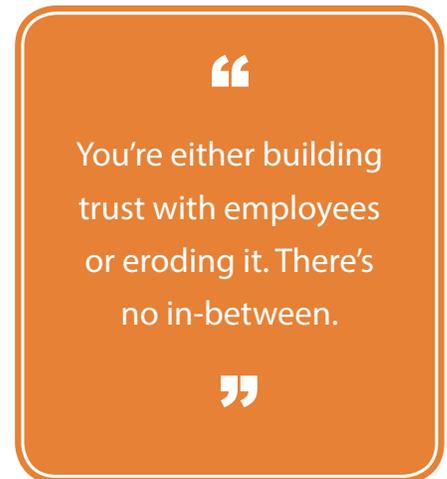
Research shows that there is a tendency to “remain silent rather than express a difference exists both in individual relationships and in groups^{xvi}” and this lack of voice takes a psychological toll on employees. It can ultimately “shut down creativity, and undermine productivity.”

When it comes to launching any HR initiative, it’s important to ensure that there are benefits that don’t only speak to HR, but also executives, leaders, and most importantly, employees. Here are a number of benefits that come from activating Employees Voice in the organization:

1. It improves engagement, breeds alignment, and develops trust (and communication)

When done right, the concept of actively listening to Employee Voice improves trust. You’re either building trust with employees or eroding it. There’s no in-between.

Allowing employees to speak openly displays a level of trust which enables them to feel more valued and more connected to the leaders of an organization – as well as to other employees. As author Stephen M.R. Covey wrote in his book *The Speed of Trust*, “The first job of a leader—at work or at home—is to inspire trust. It’s to bring out the best in people by entrusting them with meaningful stewardships, and to create an environment in which high-trust interaction inspires creativity and possibility.”^{xvii}



2. It enables leaders and makes them accountable

When an Active Listening strategy is developed, it supports focus on building a successful employee experience by offering real-time feedback to leaders. When leaders have that insight, they can have real-time conversations with employees to support employees’ personal and organizational success.

For example, the failure of an annual performance appraisal is the approach because it isn’t frequent enough. The annual engagement survey has similar issues. When you start adjusting your approach to Active Listening, the benefits that come with it are higher levels of accountability for your leaders and

enabling them to better engage employees.

3. It offers actionable insights to HR and supports better people decisions.

Above and beyond leaders and employees, Active Listening offers HR and executives the ability to gain insight in real-time and deal with smoke before fire.

Giving HR and executives the ability to proactively pinpoint issues allows for changes to be made before potential issues get worse. By identifying an issue with employee sentiment for a specific department or leader, digging deeper may save from retention issues moving forward.

Also, seeing fantastic results can help promote and identify high-potential leaders to ensure retention of great talent.

According to Karen Cariss, "Machine learning algorithms will apply text and pattern recognition analytics to enrich the insights delivered via employee surveys, providing HR professionals with an accurate reflection of employee sentiment, engagement and productivity in real time. HR professionals will have the tools to be able to better make data-driven workforce decisions."^{xviii}

4. It eliminates a one-size-fits-all solution

When insights are only viewed in aggregate at the organization level, it's easy to identify a one-size-fits-all solution based on poor results in a particular area. We find that this traditional approach to action doesn't result in improved engagement.

When we can serve insights at the individual leader level and begin personalizing insights, training, and action, this is where companies will be able to deliver a more targeted and engaging solution throughout the whole organization.

Offering employees a voice in a structured way can create a more powerful and productive workplace. By offering employees the ability to share feedback, and then to in-turn listen and prioritize and act on that feedback, can improve not only workplace satisfaction and employee engagement, but also boost your bottom line.

YEAH, BUT GOOD LUCK SELLING IT INTO MY COMPANY

One of the challenges we keep hearing is that even with a sound approach and a belief that this is important, selling the concept in to executives is painful. At times it can be difficult to articulate why a sound Employee Voice strategy works, but here are four methods that we have seen prove successful in the past:

1. Establish an employee first philosophy

Have a direct conversation with leadership if they don't believe focusing on employees is important. One way to get them aligned is by discussing the 'Service Profit Chain' which is illustrated by this image.



If you make the point that customer satisfaction and shareholder value (or however you define successful results of your company) are *outputs*, then really the only *inputs* the company can help support are employee behaviors. It is the employee behaviours, products they build, services they provide and problem solving which are the only thing you can have a direct impact on.

Listening and making an experience where employees can succeed will lend itself to better outputs at the end of the day.

2. Assess what the company spends on customer technology versus employee technology

If you take the concepts discussed earlier in this guide about technology investments being dramatically larger than employee technology, and add real numbers on what the investments in your company is to make better experiences and research into hearing the voice of employees, making that parallel to investments in people is quite eye-opening.

Educate executives on the cost of turnover. PeopleKeep estimates employee turnover costs organizations the following:

- 16% of annual salary for high-turnover, low-paying jobs (earning under \$30,000 a year). For example, the cost to replace a \$10/hour retail employee would be \$3,328.
- 20% of annual salary for midrange positions (earning \$30,000 to \$50,000 a year). For example, the cost to replace a \$40k manager would be \$8,000.
- Up to 213% of annual salary for highly educated executive positions. For example, the cost to replace a \$100k CEO is \$213,000.

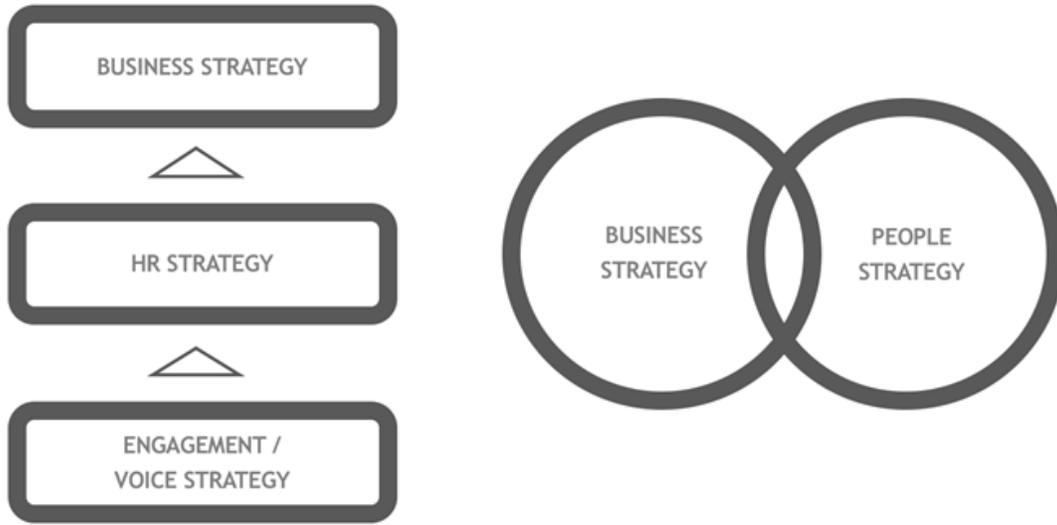
Consider the cost to hire, train, lost intellectual capacity and other intangibles.^{xix} Effective employee listening can show significant ROI from retention benefits alone.

3. HR also needs data to make decisions

In HR, we're always pushed to come to the table with data-based decisions or proposals. Understanding the voice of employees and pinpointing gaps in the company that will have a negative impact employee engagement and retention and being able to predict and correlate this insight into business results is an important angle to discuss with your executives.

4. This isn't just an HR strategy, it's a People Strategy

Your HR strategy shouldn't live in isolation. When that happens, it's harder to build alignment with the rest of leadership. Convince leadership that this is indeed a People Strategy that runs parallel to the company strategy. Having a sound Employee Voice strategy allows HR to offer insight to all leaders in the company, enables them to be accountable and successful and make better decisions that will help the business realize its vision.



YOU'RE PREACHING TO THE CONVERTED. WHERE DO I START?!

There are several ways to approach an Employee Voice strategy - it can get a bit overwhelming. To help you, below are some places to start or things to consider when you go down this road:

1. **Start with the right vision and definition of success** - Align the philosophy of the executive team to understand the value of Employee Voice and determine what success looks like. Typically, many companies focus on increasing engagement levels, improving retention, and creating a better sentiment about leadership in the organization. Think about metrics that can be tracked at the executive level (i.e. overall engagement or eNPS score) and other specific areas where Employee Voice can be leveraged, for example:
 - Employee Engagement
 - Diversity & Inclusion
 - Leader and employee communication (i.e. check-ins)
 - Change management and business transformation
 - Onboarding & exit feedback effectiveness
 - Project Effectiveness
 - Cultural due diligence or integration in M&A

2. **Remember the types of Employee Voice** – when determining the right questions to ask or approach, step back and ensure that you’re supporting two types of voice as defined by Investors in People that are critical for sustainable success:^{xx}

- *Workplace Dissatisfaction* - facing dissatisfaction in the workplace by encouraging employees to offer their concerns openly and honestly rather than leaving
- *Participative Management* – the extent to which employees have input into the decision-making process

The mere fact of having feedback from employees on the topic of dissatisfaction might make for a griping session, but when you also ask for their ideas and feedback and discuss and prioritize actions, it can be both impactful and beneficial.

3. **It isn’t just about engagement surveys** – many companies limit employee voice to an engagement survey, but by getting the voice of employees for several reasons (as indicated above in #1), data can start being processed to offer further analysis and develop new insights.

4. **Get more frequent** – it’s time to say good-bye or supplement the annual engagement or satisfaction survey. Quite simply, our companies move way too rapidly for infrequent feedback. Feel free to use them as a baseline each year, but there needs to be more in-between.

5. **What are the right questions to ask?** – there can be a whole other guide dedicated to this topic, but at a high-level, it really depends on what you’re trying to accomplish. Here’s a few tips:

- Ensure there are *measurable items* you can trend and define positive or negative movement



WorkTango customers have supplemented or completely replaced the annual engagement survey for frequent Active Listening quarterly, monthly, bi-weekly, weekly or even ad-hoc for many reasons beyond engagement.



- Offer employees *open-ended opportunities* for feedback or ideas. You will receive suggestions and ideas that aren't leading based on your questions
 - *Don't set it and forget it.* It will become stale quickly if you automate everything, and it will limit your ability to gather feedback for current happenings in the company
 - *Add 'future-forward' questions.* Questions that rely on the past are beneficial, however, future-oriented questions are important in enabling a more proactive approach to your strategy.
6. **Anonymous or Not?** - The point of hearing the true voice of employees is to get an accurate and authentic understanding of how things are going in the company. Typically, when employee surveys get filled out, especially when employees feel that they're logged into a system or being asked demographic questions, they tend to err on the side of caution. A lot of this hinders real feedback.

We suggest anonymity to get honest feedback. It's all about creating a safe space that enables employee to be authentic and real when offering their feedback.

7. **Enable and involve Leaders** – HR doesn't have to, and shouldn't be a filter. "If managers are able to effectively analyze and predict staff needs accurately, making the office environment more productive, improving career development, and implementing human resource processes should become much easier."^{xxi}

When HR can leverage leaders (which arguably have the biggest impact on the engagement and performance of employees), that is when there is a high level of accountability for leaders, as well as offering them insights to be self-aware and in tune with their teams.

8. **Leverage technology** – At the end of the day, technology is only an enabler of a sound approach, which is why this is one of the final considerations on this list. Once the approach is sound and all elements identified above are examined, that is when technology can put your Employee Voice strategy on overdrive.

There are several benefits of leveraging technology for an Active Listening approach:

- *Ease of use* – simple to create and customize to individual requirements
- *Real-time insights* – gone are the days of waiting months, weeks or even days for insights, technology can offer valuable insights in real-time
- *Robust Analytics* – it’s not just about aggregate insight, but tech can instantly compare and stack rank insights, pinpoint key issues and share insights automatically
- *Predictability* – analytics shouldn’t be only a view of the past, but data science and regression models can be calculated on the fly using technology to predict the right places to focus action or predict future engagement and retention
- *Access* – technology offers the ability to allow different employees to see different insights, for example, giving leaders real-time insights into their direct reports and hierarchies
- *Natural Language Processing* – seeing employee comments summarized easily by themes and sentiments to speed up the insight from Employee Voice

A model we’ve used at WorkTango to help support companies get in the right frame of mind is illustrated below:



When developing your Employee Voice strategy, think about your HR and Talent team as focusing on the four key pillars above (Promoting, Listening, Communicating Results, Taking Action) in a continuous loop. Having the right philosophy, technology and approach to involving leaders can help accelerate this in a very agile way so that Active Listening is exactly that, active, and always-on.

CONCLUSION

You're spending time and money measuring the critical areas of your business – marketing, sales, operations – so why not your most critical resources? Measuring how your employees are feeling at work will empower you with the knowledge to make the right changes at the right time. Making the right changes will help your workforce deliver better results, faster.

Remember, however, that activating Employee Voice isn't just about listening to what's happened in the past. Employee Voice coupled with predictability and action is where the rubber hits the road and impact can be made.

HR departments and approaches are changing as they react to the consumerization of HR given the changing workforce around them. Given these rapid changes, archaic practices quite simply aren't going to cut it anymore. It's those that change and react that will find themselves recruiting, retaining, and engaging talent to successful company growth.

A new Employee Voice strategy supports a more organic approach to talent management that keeps the whole organization aligned and involved. It offers the ability for employees to offer feedback and deliver insights to not only HR, but all leaders in the organization to support the right actions. After all, understanding our employees is key. They conduct the daily behaviours that make the strategic direction companies envision a reality.



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WorkTango enables companies to give their employees a voice and easily collect feedback for any purpose. Using data science and natural language understanding, actionable insights from employee feedback is served in real-time to HR, executives, and people leaders. The results are quicker insight and action, better people decisions, and a more aligned and engaged workforce.

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