An HR guide to employee engagement surveys
Highly engaged workers drive more productivity.

The problem is, many businesses fail to engage their workers. Only 40 percent of U.S. employees are actively engaged in their work, while 13 percent are “actively disengaged” and the remaining 47 percent are “not engaged” (Harter 2020). This could be due to poor leadership, toxic work cultures, failing to find and leverage authentic motivators in your rewards and recognition, or even something as benign as companies not knowing how to get the most from their workforce.

But it’s crucial that companies engage their workers. It adds revenue, shareholder value, and aids in the resilience of a business during hard times and more. This means engaging employees isn’t just a lofty HR goal, it’s a bottom-line factor for your business.

But how do you pull this off? Particularly if you’re already wearing a ton of hats and managing a million things to keep the business afloat? It may seem like there would never be enough time in the day to add something as abstract as employee engagement. But that’s the short HR view. The long term POPS view understands hiring top talent, and engaging those people is the key to competitive sustainable advantage.

In this short eBook we go over two primary types of employee engagement surveys, which can be a one tool you use to engage your workforce and solicit their feedback on your process, work environment, or more.
Types of engagement surveys
At a broad level are two different styles of engagement surveys. Short quick ones and long ones.

The pulse survey is a short employee engagement survey (typically 1-5 questions long) sent informally and semi-regularly to staff to gauge the health of an organization at a moment.

The employee engagement survey is a much more robust employee engagement survey (typically 20-50 questions long) that POPS leaders send out once or twice annually to gauge the health of their workforce over time.

Let’s look into both with a little more detail.
Pulse Surveys

Employers use pulse surveys to get quick, real-time feedback from their organizations. They’re great for assessing employee reactions to certain milestones or events in the business like appointing a new CEO, or launching a new product. You could survey your staff before and after each key event to understand how your organization feels about the change. The same response-based pulse survey could be used to determine how people react to new PTO policies, new snacks in the office, a change to roles or responsibilities, or changes to the rhythm of the business.

An example of an employee pulse survey using Google Forms.
KEY FACTS:

✓ Short (1-5 questions)
✓ Surveys the health of your organization in a particular moment
✓ Helpful in ascertaining feelings around key events / milestones
✓ Surveys can be sent casually: in Google forms, or other free digital questionnaires
Employee Engagement Survey Models

Employee engagement surveys are longer questionnaires that take a deep dive into the health of the organization. Unlike pulse surveys, these aren’t quick check-ins. Instead, employee engagement surveys are thoughtfully designed questionnaires that occur only once or twice a year. Employers use engagement surveys to inform key business decisions, monitor the health of an organization over time, and uncover important areas in the business that need attention.
Often these types of surveys use longitudinal methods of data collection, meaning the questionnaires are used over an extended amount of time. For this reason employee engagement surveys should be deployed using professional cloud-based software where answers can be stored securely over time. Questions should be developed with longitudinal thinking in mind, meaning questions should be developed that measure what matters by building a survey that is consistent, and make sure your questions can inform actionable change.

An example of an employee engagement survey inside Zenefits. Source: People Operations, 2021
When building your surveys take slow, considered time. You’ll want to build one survey that remains relevant over time. Consistency is critical for data analysis. Data gets wonky if you don’t ask questions in the same way, or don’t ask the same questions at all, between surveys. Be clear and easy.

There are many models for measuring employee engagement which can inform your own benchmarks or indices. We’ll recap a few here.

**Kenexa’s Employee Engagement Index (EEI)**

According to the Kenexa Research Institute, which studies workplace performance, an employee engagement index can be scored based on four key categories:

- Pride
- Satisfaction
- Advocacy
- Retention
Deloitte’s “Irresistible” Employee Engagement Model

A research team at Deloitte studied employee engagement indicators for five years, landing on five major elements (and 20 supporting strategies) that made a business “irresistible” to work for. Those are:

- **Meaningful work**
  - Autonomy
  - Small, empowered teams
  - Time for slack

- **Hands-on management**
  - Clear, transparent goals
  - Coaching
  - Invest in management development
  - Modern performance management

- **Positive work environment**
  - Flexible work environment
  - Humanistic workplace
  - Culture of recognition
  - Inclusive, diverse work environment
• Growth opportunity
  ∙ Training and support on the job
  ∙ Facilitated talent mobility
  ∙ Self-directed, dynamic learning
  ∙ High-impact learning culture

• Trust in leadership
  ∙ Mission and purpose
  ∙ Continuous investment in people
  ∙ Transparency and honesty
  ∙ Inspiration
Employee Net Promoter Scores (eNPS)

eNPS scores are a simple, but effective, metric that simply consists of asking employees if they would recommend working at your organization to friends, colleagues, or family.

To calculate your eNPS, first include the question: “I would recommend working at this organization to friends, colleagues, or family” on your employee engagement survey. Employees will rank their agreement on a zero to 10 scale. People who score six or less are classified as “detractors,” seven to eight are considered “passives” and nine and 10 are considered “promoters.” Subtract the detractors from the promoters, and you will have your organization’s score.

A negative score tells you that employees, on the whole, don’t recommend your organization as a place to work, while a positive score shows good employee engagement and positive affiliation with the company.

Mercer’s “What’s Working” Employee Engagement Index

Mercer, a leader in HR consulting, surveyed 30,000 people in 17 countries to find 12 core dimensions of work that have strong correlations to employee engagement, and lumped them into an employee engagement index built of five questions.
The 12 dimensions are:

- Work processes
- Quality and customer focus
- Communication
- Work/life balance
- Job security and career growth
- Teamwork and cooperation
- Ethics and integrity
- Immediate manager
- Performance management
- Rewards (compensation and benefits) and recognition
- Leadership and direction
- Training and development
The “What’s Working Index” measures employee responses to the following statements:

- I feel a strong sense of commitment to this company.
- I am proud to work for this company.
- I would recommend my organization to others as a good place to work.
- I am not considering leaving this company in the next 12 months.
- I am willing to go “above and beyond” in my job to help this company be successful.

The above models should be seen as informative and educational. You can choose one of the models to inform your process, or start from scratch on your own theories of employee engagement. Regardless of which modality you choose, the important things to remember are that employee engagement surveys need to be actionable and repeatable. Favor question framing so that you get quantifiable answers when possible. And, again, take your time building these surveys. We can’t stress this enough. It often takes People Teams months to design the questions.
KEY FACTS:

✓ Long (20-50 questions)
✓ Surveys the health of your organization across time
✓ Helpful in tracking long term employee / employer well being
✓ Surveys should be sent in a professional, secure, cloud-based format
Empirical measurement of employee engagement

Empirical data means data based on observation or experience. It’s used to verify the truth or falsity of a claim. Rolling out employee engagement surveys is a first step into understanding your employee experience. But sometimes relying on survey data alone can lead to misunderstandings. For example, employees are sometimes afraid to speak their minds honestly in surveys, even if they’re anonymous. Or, employees might not see the value in taking a survey, so they rush through the answers without careful consideration. To balance any bias in engagement surveys best-in-class POPS teams track empirical data points, too.

The following are examples of empirical measurements that can help you track employee engagement without the involvement of employees.

It’s best to keep track of these rates consistently in a secure, cloud-based system.
1. Employee turnover rate

Employee turnover rate is the measurement of the number of employees who leave an organization during a specified time period, typically one year. It’s an important data point to track because consistently high turnover rates could be an indication of greater problems such as management, values, or collaboration.

2. Absenteeism

Absenteeism is the rate at which people don’t show up for work, or show up late, without good reason, as measured by the average number of days taken off by your employee base, and then looking for anomalies. High rates of absenteeism suggest disengaged workers who don’t want to put in effort.

3. 90-day new hire success

Most turnover happens in the first 90 days, so be particularly objective in monitoring these first three months. Look at the rates of new employee 90-day failure, as well as employee engagement with onboarding content. If your employees are failing right out of the gates—as calculated by leaving the company or not getting up to speed quickly enough—this can indicate gaps in your organization. You may have a poor onboarding process, lack of training, lack of managerial and team support, or a bad hiring fit.
Try It Out! Build Your Own Employee Engagement Survey!

There’s no better way to get started with employee engagement surveys than to start building them.

Using a separate sheet of paper, or workspace, start considering what questions your company would include in a pulse survey and an employee engagement survey. We’ve provided a few example questions for an employee engagement survey below.
Ready to invest in People Operations?

Did you know Zenefits offers employee engagement survey tools in its HR suite? Companies that want their HR processes all in one place rest assured that their processes are taken care of with Zenefits’ full-service People Operations Platform.

- Core HR
- Payroll
- Benefits
- Employee engagementsurveys
- HR advisory services
- And more!

This is a great way to use pre-crafted employee engagement surveys built with professional quality for affordable rates.

Get connected with a Zenefits sales representative today, write to hello@zenefits.com
Sample questions for Employee Engagement Survey
1. INDIVIDUAL ENGAGEMENT

- I am compensated fairly for the work that I do
- I am proud to work here
- I would recommend this organization to friends and colleagues
- I feel motivated by my role, team or workplace
- I feel supported by my team
- I see myself working here in five years
- I am excited by my work
- I know what is expected of me

2. TEAM DYNAMICS AND TRUST

- I feel valued by my manager and team
- I trust my colleagues and management team
- I enjoy working with my team
- I feel that the goals of the company are aligned with my own
- I trust the leadership of this company
- I feel that my team is effective
- I trust my colleagues to do their jobs well
- My team helps me complete my work
- I know who I can turn to for help
3. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

- I feel included, and that my opinions are met with inclusivity
- I feel we hire and value a diverse workforce
- My colleagues respond to nonconforming ideas with compassion and inclusivity
- I respond to nonconforming ideas with compassion and inclusivity
- I am afraid to speak my mind.

4. TECHNOLOGY AND RESOURCES

- I am given the proper time and resources to do my job well
- I feel that I have been trained properly for my role
- My team and company listen to the technology or tools that we need to get the job done
- Our technology and tools are sufficient to get the job done
5. RECOGNITION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- I am recognized for my work
- I am valued by my team and organization
- My efforts are recognized fairly
- I am supported to advance my career
- My People Team and manager provide career development pathways
- I receive regular feedback
- My performance feedback is appropriate and forward-thinking

7. UNDERSTANDING LONG TERM GOALS AND COMPANY VISION

- I believe this company will be successful in reaching their goals in the long term
- My leadership team is effective
- I believe in the mission and values of the company
- If it were my money and opportunity, I would invest in this company
- I understand the company’s long term goals
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