

Making Employee Opinion Surveys Useful

So we ran a survey.....

Employee Opinion Surveys and Engagement Surveys provide a lot of thought provoking data, but they may create some unintended consequences.

Research by Peter Svensson from Lund University in Sweden has highlighted some of them i.e. power relationships between managers and employee are reinforced, complex problems are averaged and simplified and rather than making people feel listened to the opposite happens.

In my own experience I find that they also create an expectation that having raised a problem (by answering the survey) employees tend to feel that they have done their part and it is now up to “management” to fix it – somebody else’s problem!

The response was.....

If a survey uncovers an issue what usually happens is that HR is asked to go and “fix” the problem/manager/workforce. If the HR person is particularly astute they may be able to discover what the causes are and may even come up with some good proposals to deal with them, but that still leaves two other hurdles to overcome

1. The employees and/or management may disagree with the HR diagnosis, insist that there is nothing really wrong or be uncertain about the solutions proposed.
2. Even if they are willing to go along the proposed actions they don’t “own” them, they are someone else’s ideas.

The outcome was.....

So what happens is that problems are highlighted, people expect someone else to fix them for them, but the process used is unlikely to work and when it doesn’t management gets the blame.

Issues don’t get resolved, instead they become “proof” that the company doesn’t really care about employees views and/or is incapable of doing anything about them.

How about an alternative?

There is a way of following up on Employee Surveys (or perhaps even replacing them completely) that can accomplish all of the following:

- Give people a useful model for dealing with change in their life and at work
- Have employees and managers work together to develop their own solutions to what concerns them at their workplace
- Go beyond problems and find out what is causing them
- Reduce resistance to necessary changes and build strong relationships between team members



The instrument which does this is the Organisational Barometer, part of the Four Rooms of Change group of instruments developed by Swedish psychologist, Claes Janssen, in the late 60s and early 70s as part of his groundbreaking research on the dynamics of change.

The instrument uses a customised 40 point questionnaire to lead a group of employees through a discussion and action planning process which allows them to review where they are, where they would like to be and how to get there.

The process can be used in a large range of group sizes and is best conducted over an afternoon and following morning.

If you would like to find out more, please give me a call.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Gunzburg', with a stylized, overlapping loop at the end.

David Gunzburg

