

# Vocatus:



## Employee survey - then what?

Is the sole purpose of an employee survey to measure how satisfied your staff are? Not at all! Only by assessing their level of commitment can you deduce what actually needs to be changed.

# Is satisfaction the be-all and end-all?

It's common for an employee survey to ask about nothing but satisfaction. But what can satisfaction tell us about how committed an employee feels to their company, and the extent to which they're devoted to achieving the corporate objectives? Nothing! In order to obtain valid responses to this, you have to measure the level of commitment.



An employee survey measures what makes the workforce tick, and provides information about the extent to which staff are devoted to the company. And that's not all: Employees are given the opportunity to express their opinions about all the conditions within their working environment, such as processes, the management culture, as well as information and communication. In addition to accurately measuring the "pulse" of the workforce, management thus obtains a

### An employee survey measures how well the company is performing.

rating of the individual structures and processes from the perspective of its employees. This holistic "performance check" reveals potential weak points within the company, and shows exactly where one needs to take action—itemized in accordance with hierarchies, organizational units, sites, and countries.

And yet even the best employee survey will largely be fruitless if its findings simply end up in someone's drawer. Many companies are all too aware of this problem, and wonder what would be the point of yet another study, since ultimately it won't change anything. However, that isn't the *raison d'être* behind an employee survey, whose objective is to look at the insights that have been gained and then act on them too. This means that a coherent implementation process in the wake of the employee survey is absolutely indispensable (see Page 8, "From feedback to change").

The foundation for a successful study is a valid database, and yet a degree of caution must be exercised: It's often the case that an employee survey cannot develop its full potential because commitment is ignored, and one is only measuring the employees' satisfaction. This is a serious discrepancy: Satisfaction alone will only tell us how comfortable an employee feels within the company, and how pleasant the working environment is. However, this is only a tiny part of what's relevant for management: It's far more important

to know the extent to which an employee is committed to their company, and how devoted they are to achieving the corporate objectives. Although this presupposes that they are satisfied with their working environment, it includes a great deal more.

This is why it's vital to understand that commitment is made up of two dimensions: Satisfaction and engagement. In order to measure these aspects, one uses a standardized set of questions: How strongly do employees identify with the corporate values and objectives? How pronounced are this engagement and commitment? Would people reapply for a job with this company, and even recommend their employer? How would they rate the motivational climate? The questions also include ones about the company's current competitiveness or its future viability. The responses allow one to deduce the so-called "Employee Commitment Index" (ECI) which indicates the level of commitment.

In addition to this standardized set of questions that is used to measure the ECI, a questionnaire also contains items asking about individual aspects of the work situation:

### It's not satisfaction, but commitment that has to be measured.

Relevant topics here are the quality of work, the behavior/ attitude of one's immediate superiors, or collaboration with colleagues. These items are not universally applicable, and must be agreed individually with the company for each survey.

By combining standardized and company-specific questions, it's firstly possible to conduct an international comparison which can be used to categorize one's own ECI with the help of global benchmark data; secondly, the concept also offers enough scope to examine the precise aspects that crucially influence employee commitment in one's own company.

# Words must be followed by actions

Once the employee survey has been conducted, the insights that have been gained must lead to action. This requires easy-to-understand evaluations which can be used to quickly identify what action is needed so that concrete changes can be deduced.

Once the data has been gathered, an employee survey must not simply come to an end—after all, it has inevitably given rise to corresponding expectations among the workforce. The results must be evaluated correctly and in such a way that they indicate the way forward, and on the basis of this it will be possible to develop targeted follow-up measures.

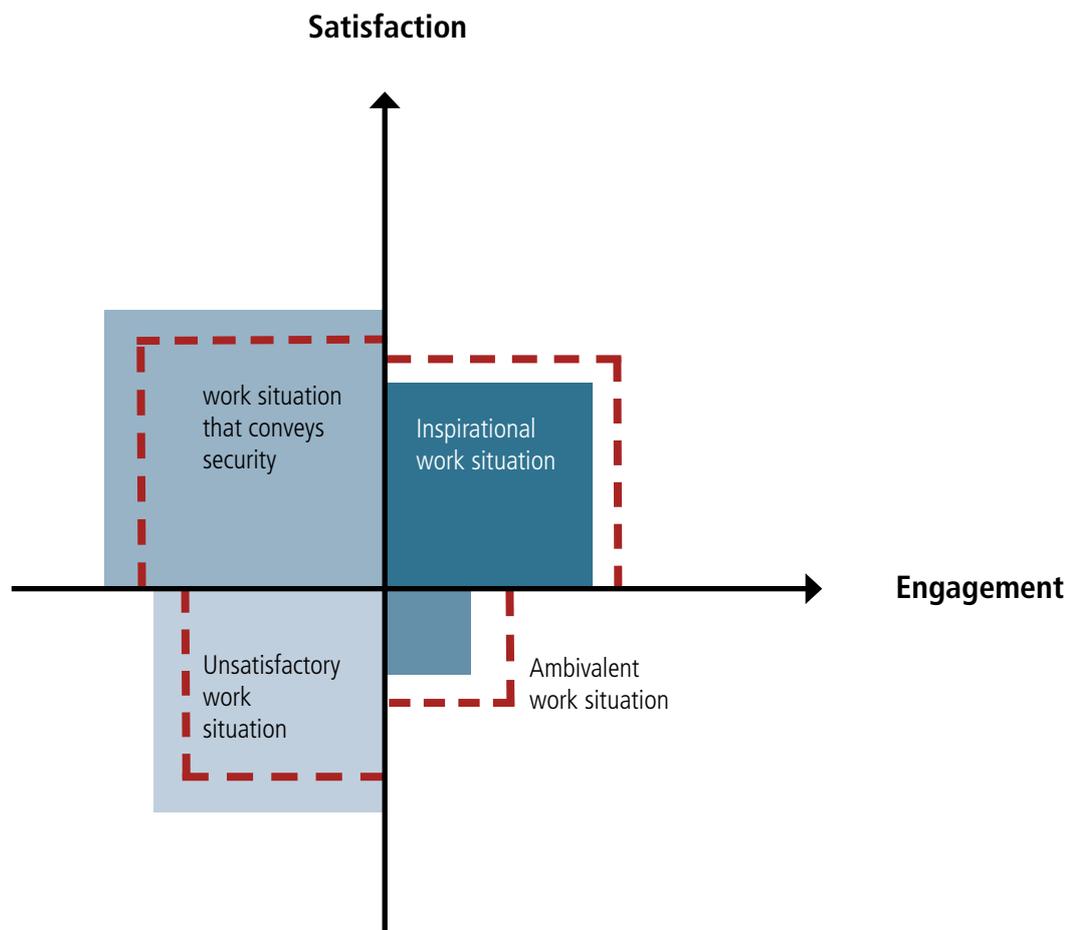
One way of evaluating the findings is to create a typology for the work situation which breaks the ECI down into its two dimensions—satisfaction and engagement—and thereby places each employee in one of the four areas (Chart 1). This makes it easy to see which of the two basic dimensions is mainly responsible for the employee commitment. It also becomes apparent that the work situation is only felt to inspire people if it satisfies them as well as motivating them to become engaged. It's interesting here to see how

the individual unit fares when compared to the company-wide average (broken red line in Chart 1). In the chart shown here, the individual unit may be able to distinguish itself via a work situation that conveys a sense of security, and yet a comparatively large number of employees feel the work situation is unsatisfactory. This is critical, because these employees are dissatisfied with the work situation and at the same time aren't particularly inspired to engage with the company. The goal must therefore be to influence the work situation so that people begin to feel motivated.

But why exactly is the work situation felt to be not very motivating, or sometimes even unsatisfactory? Where must one undertake some "fine tuning" so that improvements can be made? A strengths/weaknesses analysis (see Chart 2) will provide some detailed answers to this since it takes

Chart 1:

The typology of the work situation shows how it is perceived by employees, and provides some initial approaches that will point the way ahead if one is to make improvements.



a closer look at individual topic areas, such as “bosses’ management style” or “(further) professional training and advancement”. What’s crucial here is not only how satisfied or dissatisfied employees are with the individual aspects of these topic areas, but in particular how these

### Why do employees fail to engage with their company?

aspects influence commitment. The joint analysis makes it easy to judge whether a specific aspect constitutes a strength or a weakness, or “only” an opportunity or risk. This is vital information for the implementation process,

since it allows a clear prioritization: Both axes are needed if one is to determine which performance aspects ought to be prioritized. If one were to solely rely on the satisfaction rating (vertical axis) one might arrive at a false estimate of the current situation within the evaluation unit, since not every performance aspect that receives a high satisfaction score is a strength, and not every performance aspect that receives a low satisfaction score requires urgent changes.

Chart 2 analyzes examples from the areas of “professional situation” and “further training and advancement”, and one positive thing that’s apparent is that employees are



deployed to suit their skills (1). They aren't satisfied with the further training that's on offer (5), and yet given its minor significance in terms of commitment this aspect is of only secondary importance and doesn't need to be prioritized in the "change" phase. However, employees are critical of "autonomy and taking personal responsibility" (2), and feel that opportunities for professional development are lacking in the company (4). These aspects also exert a relatively major influence on commitment, so they constitute weaknesses which must be dealt with in the follow-up process.

These ways of evaluating things enable one to make reliable statements about the current state of employee commitment. Moreover, the findings are presented in such

**The right evaluations make it easy to identify areas for action.**

a way that it's easy to identify relevant areas for action and deduce concrete changes that are required. This lays the foundation stone for accurate follow-up measures.

*Chart 2:*

The strengths/weaknesses analysis shows which aspects influence commitment in a positive or negative manner.

**Professional situation and advancement**



- 1 Deployed in accordance with knowledge and skills (not overstretched or understretched)
- 2 Autonomy and taking responsibility for one's own work (scope to make decisions)
- 3 Appropriateness of job's psychological requirements (e.g. stressful situations due to pressure of time)
- 4 Range of opportunities for professional development within the company
- 5 Promotion of professional and social skills via seminars, workshops, and other further training offers

# From feedback to change

The final element on the road to change is the most important one, but at the same time the most difficult too. The insights obtained via the employee survey must now be used to deduce actions which need to be integrated into the existing corporate structures and processes. This is a Herculean task which can only succeed if there is a structured implementation process.

If an employee survey is conducted, this gives rise to expectations within the workforce that something will actually change. Simply the opportunity to provide feedback

## The findings of the employee survey mustn't end up in someone's drawer.

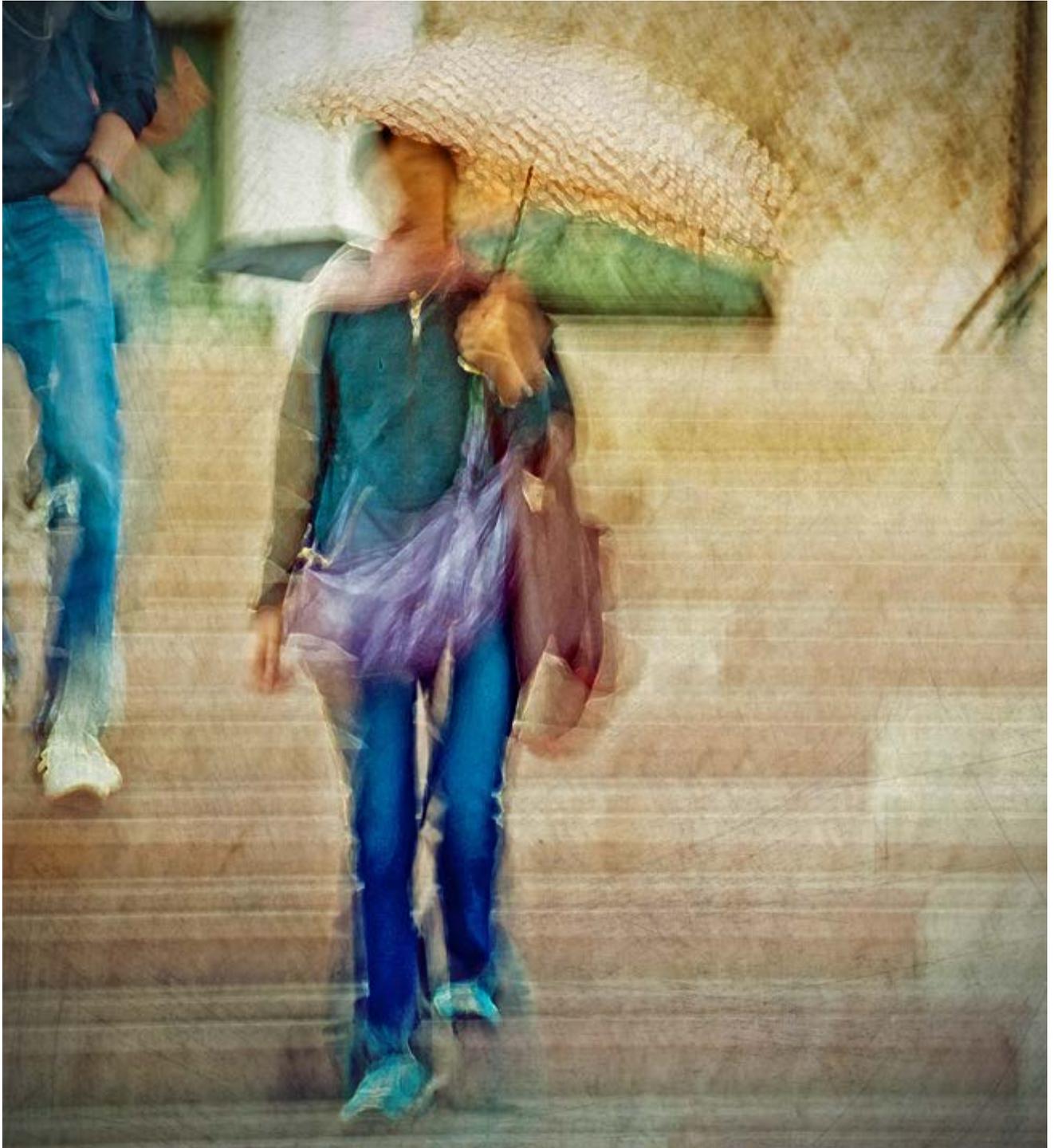
and be heard at the management level already creates an appetite for change, so it's all the more disappointing if the findings nonetheless end up in someone's drawer and this appetite is not satisfied. But how can one proceed from evaluations to concrete actions? This isn't an easy step to make, and it goes way beyond the mere carrying out of an employee survey.

Successfully implementing the findings in the form of actions and initiatives requires clear prioritization and a certain level of respect within the company. Employees, managers, and above all the people in charge of the company must buy into the study and be willing to instigate a process of change.

To begin with, the results reports are shown to the managers who are responsible: Every manager receives the results for their subordinate units. Secondly, the evaluations are used to identify the relevant areas for action, and corresponding measures are deduced from this. These remedial measures must then be systematically woven into the company's structures and processes.

The simplest and most effective way of doing this is to use the available resources and pre-existing platforms and communication routes. This minimizes the time and effort required for the implementation process and also has the major advantage that the steps taken can immediately be integrated into day-to-day business. If, for example, one were to go through the findings with all those involved in a closed, one-day workshop, the implementation process would be viewed as a stand-alone project and be detached from what happens on a daily basis.

In order to make the follow-up process as straightforward as possible, the respective manager is shown how they can help themselves, and so-called moderators represent a substantial source of support in this respect.



Moderators are usually internal staff who are specially trained about the topic of employee surveys: They help to interpret the reports, lead team discussions in which the results of the employee survey are examined, and join with the manager to supervise the implementation process.

Another—very innovative—form of assistance is provided by the so-called “action database” which lists every item in the questionnaire and then breaks it down further. It shows

possible reasons why a given aspect has been badly rated, and as a next step offers suggestions as to which measures might

**The process of change will only succeed if it's clearly structured.**

be introduced in order to eradicate the relevant weaknesses. For example, there was some criticism in the employee survey that managers were only rarely available if one

needed to talk to them. The action database supplies possible reasons for this: Maybe there's a need for regular discussions? Might the manager's PA constitute an obstacle because they don't even bother to pass on requests from employees? Based on these approaches, the action database duly provides some recommendations: Thus, for example, one could introduce an "open door hour" when employees get to see their manager without an appointment and without the PA's say-so.

Nevertheless, the manager is unable to influence every area that requires action, and it often needs overarching measures at corporate level. For example, it does not fall within the

### Employee surveys have the potential to optimize entire corporate structures.

manager's remit to ensure there are adequate opportunities for further training, so the employees' feedback must be passed to the respective department at the company's headquarters, such as Human Resources, where it can be duly processed.

Moreover, the employee survey impacts on entire topic areas: For example, if management thinks that a high level of customer orientation is important, the employee survey can include an additional question which measures how employees perceive this customer orientation in their day-to-day work. This provides management with a very accurate picture of how the corporate policy that's been established is being implemented "at the grass roots". Weaknesses

are thereby noticed for the first time, and the employees' attention can be directed toward important areas which have hitherto been wrongly neglected. Current issues—such as planning the company's kindergarten or the new rules about flexible working hours—can easily be integrated into the employee survey.

Throughout the entire implementation process, it's also important to tell employees about the progress that's been made and the measures that have been introduced. This shows them that their feedback has been taken seriously and a genuine effort is being made to initiate change. In the final step, it's vital not to lose sight of the implementation process and to carry out regular checks to monitor success.

For example, the agreed targets for the respective manager can include the fact that the measures that have been deduced must be implemented within a certain timeframe. The status of the implementation process should also be regularly reported to the next level up. However, this doesn't mean the employee survey should attribute blame, let alone lead to sanctions or penalties. The survey doesn't aim to punish suboptimal performance; instead, it must be viewed as an opportunity to improve one's own performance as well as provide employees with an inspirational work situation which will increase their commitment.

If one exploits the full potential of an employee survey, it will be far more than a barometer of the prevailing mood. It can be used as a reliable and strategic management tool which reveals weaknesses and makes a valuable contribution to smooth and healthy corporate development.



## **Doro Lehnen**

Just as a good author is able to make their readers read between the lines, this photo art invites viewers to engage with a world between the pixels. To this end, the artist likes to experiment with time exposures and deliberate lack of focus. The anonymity of the person in the crowd is likewise often reflected in the photo art. In order to further underline the sense of surrealism, color distortion and lighting feature heavily.

Website: [www.weltenspieglerin.de](http://www.weltenspieglerin.de)

Sales: <http://www.seenby.de/doro-lehnen>

# vocatus:

Vocatus is an international consulting and market research company specialising in employee commitment. In all its projects, the company gives priority to solving real-life problems, making concrete recommendations and delivering results that provide a basis for efficient implementation.

Vocatus has been honored several times, receiving international awards for its innovative studies and highly practical conceptual work.

Vocatus is an active member in the German Association of Market and Social Researchers (BVM) and the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR).

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