

## Why employee engagement surveys should not be an annual endeavour

Employee engagement is still treated by many organisations like a checkbox exercise – superficial and extraneous. This, however, is a very risky misconception, warns an employee engagement specialist.



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“There’s still a perception that engagement is a ‘nice-to-have’,” says Andrew Cook, founder of HeadsUp, an AI-driven employee engagement platform. “But the truth is, disengaged employees hurt performance, increase turnover, and weaken customer satisfaction. If engagement isn’t a strategic priority, you’re bleeding value.”

### Lack of useful data

If “improve communication” is the best your employee engagement data can offer, you’ve got a bigger problem than poor communication. You’ve got bad data – vague, lagging, and impossible to act on. And that’s not just frustrating. It’s expensive.

“Companies aren’t short on feedback,” Cook points out.

“What they’re short on is useful feedback. Generic insights like ‘improve communication’ tell you nothing actionable. What kind of communication? Between whom? About what?”

This lack of specificity makes it nearly impossible for leaders to understand what’s really going on, let alone fix it. When employee feedback is too broad, leadership is left guessing – and guessing rarely drives meaningful change.

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## The high cost of low engagement

Part of the problem is confusion between engagement and satisfaction. They're not the same – not even close.

“You can have satisfied employees who are not engaged – they show up, do what's required, and leave. Engaged employees, on the other hand, are proactive, invested, and drive innovation and growth.

“Engagement is about energy, involvement, and commitment. Satisfaction is about comfort and contentment. Engaged employees are the ones who show up with both energy and purpose.”

If you're not measuring engagement accurately, you're not managing your workforce effectively. And most traditional methods are a big part of the problem then snowballing.

## The survey trap

Old-school engagement surveys are lagging indicators. They're long, tedious, and often delivered once a year – producing data that's outdated before it's even analysed. But, even if it were possible, doing long, traditional surveys more frequently would just invite new issues.

“Survey fatigue is real,” Cook explains. “It's not just how often you ask – it's how much effort you're demanding. Long, complex surveys push people to disengage or give shallow responses. That kind of data is worse than useless – it then actively leads you in the wrong direction.”



He continues: “With the best of intentions, organisations will try to capture everything in one big marathon-push because they're only surveying annually. Besides the data being outdated before it's analysed, the insights end up not reflecting the real employee experience, because the survey is too taxing for staff to do properly.”

Forward-thinking organisations are shifting to lighter, more frequent check-ins to overcome these issues. Advances in AI and sentiment analysis are making it easier to pick up early signals – and act on them quickly.

## Real results from better feedback

The payoff for getting engagement surveying right is substantial. One business process outsourcing (BPO) company, facing a staggering 62% attrition rate, cut turnover by 12% and reduced unplanned absenteeism by 15% after adopting a more responsive engagement strategy.

Another saw a 13% rise in employee engagement – and an 11% bump in customer satisfaction – after tightening its feedback loop.

These aren't outliers. They're signals of a broader shift: from static surveys to continuous dialogue. From checking a box to building a culture of responsiveness.



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## Transparency builds trust

According to Cook, we've reached a turning point. "Employees don't just want to be heard – they want to see that what they say matters. Even if the change takes time, what matters is the acknowledgement and validation."

HeadsUp's own data backs this up. When leaders show up after staff speak up – even just to explain constraints – engagement levels go up. Participation in regular check-ins climbs from around 15% to over 30% when employees see their input being taken seriously.

But when feedback disappears into a black hole? Participation drops. Trust erodes. People disengage.

## Where we go from here

The future of engagement isn't in more surveys. It's in smarter ones – brief, frequent, transparent, and tied to action. "The goal isn't just measurement. It's momentum," emphasises Cook.

"When employees feel heard, and then see the follow-through, they don't just stick around; they lean in."

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