

A photograph of a diverse group of business professionals in a modern office setting. They are seated around a long wooden conference table, engaged in a meeting. The office has large windows, potted plants, and modern lighting fixtures. The scene is brightly lit and professional.

## HRIZONS' Solution Guide

# Thinking Beyond the Survey: A guide to help shift employee experience from survey to strategy

*A year-round employee listening program designed for the operating cadence of organizations to encourage change for an open and healthy culture*

## ***For many companies with employee experience (EX) programs, creating and sustaining a healthy employer brand and culture can be achieved by deploying the ultimate employee listening tool: the survey.***

Surveys are an important piece of the employee experience (EX) puzzle. They are, however, only one of the pieces. Asking for annual, or even quarterly, feedback doesn't constitute a strategy. It's only when organizations think of surveys within a broader context – cross-functionally planned, designed, communicated, analyzed, and acted upon – that they achieve results.

This guide will help you ***Think Beyond the Survey*** to transform employee experience.

### **Five ways to take employee experience from survey to strategy**

#### **1. Gain leadership commitment**

Research shows that [cultural change requires alignment](#) at both the leader and employee level. Leaders need to commit to embracing and acting on feedback.

They must also commit to long-term employee engagement, not quick fixes. The Association of Talent Development shared [a great article about the difference between strategies that unleash employee potential](#) and efforts that throw band-aids at lagging morale.

Additionally, because employee experience strategies require cross-functional collaboration, leaders must allocate resources and time to EX-programming.

In short, leadership buy-in is essential to employee experience.

#### **2. Brand and communicate your employee listening program**

It's not just leaders that need to be on board with employee experience. Employees at every level must trust that sharing open and honest feedback will lead to positive change. They need to know:

- When surveys or other listening initiatives are coming
- Why they are coming
- Where and how to participate
- The value of participating
- How feedback has been and will be used

**HRIZONS' EX** team has seen organizations approach program branding and communication creatively. We've seen leaders dress in silly costumes for company-wide videos. We've seen contests and pizza parties. Best of all, we've seen steady, ongoing, consistent messaging to ensure that over time, employee engagement programming becomes part of organizations' culture.

#### **3. Design thoughtfully**

Effective listening initiatives ask [fewer questions, more often](#), but those questions and times are carefully planned. To move the needle on employee engagement, think beyond the annual survey: are you listening to employees at key moments, like during onboarding or times of intense change? Are you listening to them in a broad set of ways, like through manager one-on-ones or in townhall meetings?

If your organization wants to track progress on employee priorities, a monthly or quarterly pulse survey with consistent questions may be the right approach. If a serious incident requires quick feedback and action, your organization may wish to put together an ad hoc survey or a listening tour to gather feedback specific to the moment. When employees leave, you might benefit from combining the traditional exit interview with exit surveys to uncover different insights. Your organization's listening strategy will be unique, from the questions you ask to the way you ask them.

#### 4. Plan your results rollout

Feedback needs to be heard to have an impact! Thinking beyond the survey includes considering how you will communicate employee feedback to the organization. For some companies, sharing results with all employees and leadership together is the right approach. Others prefer a top-down rollout. Still others allow managers to see results in real-time. Decide when and how to share aggregated responses and insights based on your organization's structure, culture, and goals.

#### 5. Act on feedback

Taking action – and communicating about it – is such an important part of this process. If employees don't see a connection between their feedback and the actions taken, they will not feel heard. At best, this makes them less inclined to give future feedback. At worst, it creates disengagement.

When reviewing feedback, it's important not to get caught up in the numbers or comments or to think of results as a grade. Rather, consider all feedback as a starting point: a conversation-starter to drive change.

Once surveys are completed and results have been shared, it's up to the organization and each individual team to do something with the insights. Our EX experts suggest:

- Using feedback to identify small, sustainable changes that teams and the organization can tackle
- Clearly communicating about how employee feedback led to those changes

These two approaches support transformational change and an ongoing culture of feedback.

### Getting started with an employee experience strategy

As you can see from the above, approaching employee experience as a strategy, not just a survey, requires planning, cross-functional collaboration, and an understanding of organizational goals.

#### Start with the “Why”

As you design your program, focus on the reasons your organization is investing in employee listening. What business outcomes and returns on investment does it hope to see? Get specific, and then braid those intended outcomes into every part of the survey program.

Imagine, for example, that your organization wants to improve physical and psychological safety at work.

- Make it clear to your company's leaders that the upcoming survey is an opportunity to identify barriers to safety and ideas for addressing it.
- Select questions that solicit feedback specific to safety.
- Emphasize in employee communications that the upcoming survey will give teams a chance to directly impact the safety of their workplace.
- Team leaders should discuss survey outcomes with their teams and solicit ideas for improving safety, in particular.
- Organizational leaders should close the loop by announcing what actions they are taking to improve safety as a direct result of employee feedback.

In this example, by baking the goal (a safer workplace) into each part of the program, you ensure outcomes that align to that goal.

Even better: you create a virtuous cycle. Employees understand the survey, see action taken as a result, and feel encouraged to share feedback in an ongoing way.

## Remember to consider employees' "Why," too!

Until that virtuous cycle takes effect, employee listening programs need to appeal to employees' motivations. Employees are more likely to participate when they see clear value to themselves in doing so. Talk with employees at every level before, during, and after survey cycles to understand:

- The types of action they would prefer to see as a result of sharing feedback (leadership-level, team-level, cultural, etc.)
- Barriers to participation (e.g. no time to spend on surveys, no access to a laptop, fear of retaliation, etc.)
- Whether the topics they are being asked about matter to them

Perhaps it feels redundant to ask for feedback about providing feedback. But building an employee experience program without including employees in the process can lead to false assumptions and misguided initiatives.

HRIZONS' EX team has seen organizations improve their listening programs through:

- Employee focus groups.
- Asking managers to solicit one-on-one or team thoughts on the survey process
- Offering an "always-on" listening option: an email inbox, open survey, or other channel for employees to share their thoughts any time.

## Don't stop at the survey

Thinking beyond the survey can be a challenging mindset shift for organizations. Historically, company listening programs tallied annual survey responses and planned to address common challenges. A year later, they would review their progress and go through the motions again. "Survey season" was truly a season.

With today's technology, survey season can – and should – be part of a year-round employee experience strategy built into the operating cadence of the organization, where:

- Surveying employees and taking insights-based action happens continuously through frequent "pulses" and on-demand surveys.
- Continuous listening leads to regular conversations between leadership, managers, and teams.
- Regular conversations support ongoing adjustments to policies, processes, and performance.
- Leaders continuously point to employee voice as the reason for change and encourage ongoing feedback, building an open and honest culture.

## HRIZONS EX Division is here to support you

HRIZONS is a global Human Resources advisory, and advocates dedicated to helping HR leaders and organizations optimize their investment in cloud-based core HR technologies. Since 2006 we have been 100% HR and HCM/HXM focused. Our solutions experts have worked with customers on thousands of projects around the world, who have seen significant benefits from our deep experience in both Human Capital Management (HCM) and Employee Experience (EX) implementations.

Whether you use or are considering a cloud-based employee engagement technology or still work with paper surveys, HRIZONS EX can work with you to transform your employee experience program. Contact us [HERE](#) to get started!