



GAINING INSIGHT



Despite the industry for large scale employee surveys there is still a need for insightful and focused feedback on more specific questions. In recent times we have been asked to address a broad range of questions including:

- “Why do people work here? Are we connecting our plans with what interests them?”
- “Why are local managers trusted when leaders are not? What can we learn from the local managers’ relationships?”
- “How can we retain loyalty and long-term retention through the economic recession?”
- “We are constantly communicating about the need for change but it is not getting through – why not?”
- “What do people really think about our values? Do they mean anything? How could we make them more relevant?”

Without answers to questions like these, leaders could spend enormous amounts of time and money on communication that is ineffective. Getting it right and demonstrating an understanding of peoples’ needs can build leadership credibility.

Getting quality answers to tough questions need not involve large research budgets. A carefully selected sample involved in a few in-depth discussions can lead to valuable insights and action.



Here are five areas to focus on to gain insight:

1

Focus on action

The message here is to involve the people whose behaviour needs to change in the research process.

It helps to ask the question “what if...” and imagine what might need to be done depending upon a series of different possible outcomes. Critical to making sure results are acted upon is the involvement of the key players whose action may be required.

Suppose the question concerns “why is there low trust in leadership?” Possible answers could be low leadership visibility, unpopular strategies, misunderstood strategies, poor interpersonal communication skills amongst key individuals, middle managers failing to support leaders, and so on. Therefore, during the design stage invite key leaders, middle managers and others to offer their perspectives on the issue, their concerns and what they would like to get out of the work. This enables the researcher to redesign his or her process and line of questioning to ensure it meets the perceived needs of key sponsors and leaders.

2

Make it fun and engaging

Design an approach that people will enjoy. Turgid focus groups are boring for participants and subject to negative bias if dominated by outspoken critics. A wide range of research processes are available that turn dry debate into more engaging and insightful discovery discussions. The techniques use visual and emotional stimuli and involve participants in the creative process to react to imagined future scenarios. The process creates visual tools to help in the feedback process but more importantly gets participants thinking positively and broadly about the issues at hand.

3

Talk don't count

Insight is about understanding why people believe the things they do and the impact it can have on the achievement of business objectives. The kinds of explanations required concern the meanings people create in their interpretation of events and actions. Questionnaires will not generate this kind of information. For example, we do not want to know that 75% of people do not understand why we need to change; we want to know why they don't!

To understand this we need in-depth one to one or group meetings at which we can explore the question. We are interested in finding out how people hear and interpret internal and external events, who they listen to and why they think like they do. It is important to understand critical incidents that have shaped perceptions to understand how to change them in future. We may find we need to enlist the services of internal change agents in future based upon the people who really seem to influence opinion.



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4

Tell stories

Anecdotes and quotations are a central feature of feedback. They take the place of statistics in quantitative feedback, bringing the issues to life. Aim for feedback that has a high level narrative - e.g. people think a, b, c, because of d, e, f, as a result of which they believe g and h. Support this with evidence in the form of examples, quotations and illustrations drawn from participants' feedback.

5

Close loops

Give feedback to everybody involved in the process whether they are members of the executive board or employees involved in discussions. Let them know findings and actions, and dates. Do not wait for all actions to be determined in detail. Give people a heads up on emerging findings even if the leaders are still reflecting. This shows confidence and maturity, demonstrates the desire to deal with people openly and may lead to some help emerging from amongst your feedback audience. Most importantly, build a reputation for acting on your results and many more will start to volunteer for your meetings in future projects.

If you would like to receive our pocket brochure on Insight which illustrates our approach, please email us with your address at info@couravel.com

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