

# Better Decisions Begin with Better Questions

## *How Qualitative Employee Surveys Create Reliable Foundations for Decision-Making*

Every significant organisational decision begins with an assumption.

The real question is not whether we make assumptions.  
It is whether we have tested them.

## Executive Summary

Reading time: approximately 12 minutes

Audience: Executive Management, Business Unit Leaders, Project Managers, HR

Core Message:

*An employee survey only creates real value  
when observations are transformed into clear,  
transparent and actionable decisions.*

Organisational change often begins with new processes, new organisational structures or new digital tools. Yet one simple question is frequently overlooked:

### **Where are people today?**

Most organisations have access to performance indicators, dashboards and project plans. What is often missing is a reliable understanding of how change is actually experienced by the people expected to make it succeed.

For this reason, a qualitative employee survey is far more than a tool for measuring satisfaction.

When designed and interpreted correctly, it becomes a leadership diagnostic. In my experience, effective leadership begins with understanding reality before making decisions.

This Executive Paper demonstrates a practical approach for transforming open employee feedback into meaningful insights and translating those insights into concrete actions for leadership, collaboration and organisational change.

It is based on experience gained across several transformation programmes together with anonymised extracts from a comprehensive employee feedback analysis.

## 1. Why this Paper?

Across many organisations, I repeatedly hear the same statement:

"We believe we know what matters to our people."

The challenge usually begins with the word believe. A well-designed organisational assessment replaces assumptions with observations. Typical starting points include:

- numerous assumptions
- differing opinions
- competing explanations
- yet only limited understanding of what truly concerns employees
- leaders interpret symptoms
- project managers discuss processes
- HR reviews metrics

But what about the employees themselves?

In many cases, they have never genuinely been asked. Or they have been asked, but their responses were never analysed in a structured and meaningful way.

Yet this is often where the real value lies.

Not in another dashboard.

Not in another KPI.

But in the recurring patterns that emerge when people describe their day-to-day reality.

## 2. The Purpose of an Organisational Assessment

In my view, the purpose of a well-designed employee survey is **not** to measure approval or employee satisfaction.

Its purpose is to answer questions such as:

- Which issues currently have the greatest impact on the organisation?
- Where are friction points emerging?
- Which needs recur across teams and organisational levels?
- Which changes are already being embraced, and which continue to create uncertainty?
- Where are the opportunities for more effective leadership?

An organisational assessment creates a shared and evidence-based starting point for future decisions and for measuring progress over time.

Nothing more.

But certainly nothing less.

## 3. Why Open Questions are Essential

Closed questions provide numbers.

Open questions provide understanding.

Both are indispensable.

A numerical rating may indicate that employees feel under pressure. Only an open response explains **why**.

That is where meaningful analysis begins.

Organisational change is rarely driven by averages.

It is driven by recurring patterns.

## 4. From Feedback to Decisions

The moment an employee survey is launched, a new phase of the project begins. The true value of a survey does not lie in the questionnaire itself, nor in the individual responses.

It lies in what is done with the information afterwards.

The quality of the analysis, the transparency with which findings are communicated—regardless of whether they are positive or critical—and the consistent implementation of resulting actions ultimately determine whether the survey creates value.

In my experience, this process consists of eight successive steps:

1. Read every response in full.
2. Cluster open comments into common themes.
3. Identify recurring patterns.
4. Prioritise the emerging topics.
5. Recognise relationships and dependencies.
6. Formulate working hypotheses.
7. Translate insights into concrete actions.
8. Share the results transparently with employees.

Only this follow-up process transforms hundreds of individual comments into a reliable basis for decision-making.

Large employee surveys often generate several hundred responses.

Each individual contribution is valuable, yet on its own provides only limited insight.

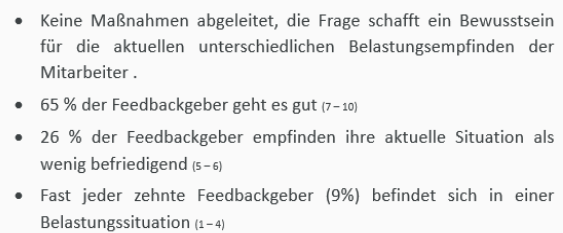
Only when similar observations are systematically brought together do meaningful patterns emerge.

Those patterns reveal priorities, highlight areas requiring attention and provide a sound basis for management decisions.

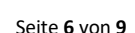
The following chapter illustrates this approach using an anonymised practical example.



In one transformation programme, approximately 140 employees were invited to share their views on collaboration, workload and future ways of working.



Only through systematic analysis were hundreds of individual responses consolidated into a small number of recurring themes, making it possible to identify clear priorities for action.



The analysis highlighted several key areas:

- Collaboration
- Communication
- Leadership
- Hybrid Working and Office Presence
- Team Cohesion
- Direction and Clarity
- Individual Workload

This structured approach transformed a broad collection of individual opinions into a reliable basis for decision-making and a clearly prioritised action plan.

Among the actions that followed were:

- The findings were shared openly with all employees.
- New communication channels were introduced, including executive video messages, newsletters and regular information updates.
- Senior management established a consistent dialogue with employees through regular video briefings.
- A dedicated leadership development programme was created to strengthen management capabilities in an increasingly digital working environment.
- Operational improvements were designed and implemented jointly with employees, increasing ownership, participation and personal responsibility.

Not every action required significant investment.

**What mattered most was that employees experienced  
a clear connection between their feedback  
and the actions that followed.**

That was the moment the survey became credible.

## 6. Common Pitfalls in Employee Surveys

Many employee surveys fail to create meaningful change—not because the questions are poor, but because the follow-up process falls short.

Typical mistakes include:

- Asking too many questions without maintaining a clear focus.
- Collecting valuable feedback without communicating the results transparently.
- Ignoring open-text responses in favour of numerical scores alone.
- Failing to prioritise the actions that matter most.
- Never evaluating whether implemented measures actually achieved the intended effect.
- Creating expectations through the survey process without demonstrating visible follow-through.

An employee survey is not the end of the process.

It is the beginning of leadership responsibility.

## 7. Key Takeaways

1. If you do not ask people, your decisions are built on assumptions.
2. An employee survey does not create change. It creates clarity.
3. Meaningful change begins with listening—genuinely listening—to the people who experience the organisation every day.

## 8. An Invitation

Every organisation is different.

That is why every engagement begins with a conversation about your specific situation.

If you are considering an employee survey—or simply want a clearer understanding of how change is experienced within your organisation—I would be pleased to explore your objectives with you.

A first conversation often starts with questions such as:

- Which challenges are currently shaping your organisation?
- What type of employee survey are you considering?
- How many people will be involved?
- What do you hope to achieve from the findings?
- Are you primarily looking for a baseline assessment, or are you aiming to develop concrete actions for change?

Every successful transformation begins with understanding the current reality.

Everything else builds upon that foundation.



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