# A Measure Of
# Happiness

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BY **ROHIT MATHUR**

> **"Always treat your employees exactly as you want them to treat your best customers."** -
> Stephen R. Covey

**M**anagers, especially those working with millennials, have obviously been observing that there is a drop in their retention rate, and that the younger employees come and go with increasing frequency - and the issue of high churn certainly overlaps with the global decline in employee engagement. And, an exit interview can hardly be the right manner to diagnose the problem, since the employee is already a step too far away from the door. While turnover is expensive, it is arguably inevitable in an age of the gig economy. Motivated employees are undeniably more diligent and produce better results than their disengaged counterparts, who either leave quickly or drain valuable resources by staying too long.

However, these positive traits will not translate to a ten-year tenure. And, instead of obsessing over staff longevity - or worse, implementing punitive measures - a company's overall focus should instead be on driving engagement in order to strengthen their employer brand and continue attracting fresh talent. This means creating a work culture that is collaborative, result-driven and empathetic; one that imbues staff with a sense of belonging and inspires them to help achieve a shared vision, thereby enhancing employee retention. That said, measuring employee happiness is a complex and subjective affair, and it takes efforts and tools to calibrate and break down an abstract emotion into tangible, objective results.

## Employee Surveys: A thing of the past

Periodic employee surveys are passé,

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quantum of employee data required by the employer, the sanctity of employee privacy, and with feedback being shared with the employee without any HR intervention, employee protection as well.

## Employee sensor tools

This, therefore has paved the way for employee sensor tools and apps such as Ramco's Empsense that record employee moods, making it possible to measure the level of employee engagement in the organisation through a single tap. The fact that such apps can be operated from cost effective Android devices placed at various locations within the premises is an added advantage. The application can also be integrated with the attendance system thereby permitting tracking of attendance and employee mood at the same time. A simple dashboard allows insights into engagement trends in real time across geographies. In the long term, it helps to evaluate managerial effectiveness, measure organisation's HR initiatives, and drive engagement outcomes. In addition, it is also possible to gather a comprehensive overview of the happiness index at an organisational level and also goes granular to team levels. This day-to-day analysis allows employers to pin point the pulse of their company and the motivation levels of each team, and provides an overview of any problematic recurrences. Drilling further down, it becomes possible for employers to examine the mood patterns of specific

since they require more effort than they are worth. It is required by the surveyor to calibrate the questions with extreme diligence so as to assess employees in a brief but effective manner; one that does not warrant too much labour to conclude. Again, while it becomes time consuming for HR to compile and analyze the responses, they may not be entirely truthful. Finally, the insights must be filed in a report to upper management for approval - and likely censorship - before publication.

There are faster and more accurate ways for a company to measure employee happiness. With enterprise software gaining traction in HR and several other corporate fields, more companies are rolling out instant feedback apps - allowing employees to register their satisfaction with the company on a scale of 0 to 10 - and mood sensors. Tech corporations like Hitachi have already tried mood sensors to track employees' emotional states, and how they affect performance, on a daily basis. In 2015, Hitachi debuted 'happiness sensors' to collect data on

employee movements 50 times per second, including time spent at rest or in conversation. The sensors record individual moods and performance in real time, enabling management to gauge the motivation levels of individual teams and extrapolate their effectiveness. However, such sensors may raise a few ethical concerns such as the

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teams, deriving a specific pattern on which to base long-term organisational welfare initiatives. For instance, a particular gender group under a specific manager might show a continuous distress trend, pointing to an imminent change in leadership or continuous low moods in high stress projects signal a burn out situation and a need to relook at the project structure. Therefore, in order to maintain employee confidentiality, anonymity is available as an option.

## Focus on privacy

Focus on privacy becomes important because feedback apps require active participation, so they are less invasive than passive mood sensors. They are essentially a mobile-friendly take on the traditional company survey, and, at the same retain some of the traditional aspects. Firstly, feedback apps are a good method of helping users raise concerns and address the root causes of workplace discontent, but employees may still be apprehensive over their digital responses being documented and used against them by managers. Getting participants' buy-in remains a challenge.

One way to mitigate this is to make the usage of such apps non-

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compulsory, and allow employees treat them like an optional poll or feedback form. HR also needs to be as strict possible when vetting those in management positions - such

individuals must be impartial, moral leaders who can be trusted to act with discretion to resolve office conflicts and associated problems. On the flipside, feedback apps, while excellent at their core function of mining data about office morale, are often not sophisticated enough to account for specific, subtle differences. Most apps cannot yet differentiate 'healthy' stress - which primes humans to reach optimal alertness and cognitive performance - from burnout, when someone is simply too stressed to complete tasks.

## The road ahead

In the future, real-time monitoring software could include a wider spectrum of responses and more detailed insights into how these moods affect performance at work. They may also go beyond morale assessments and offer automated suggestions for staff to be assigned tasks based on preference, suitability or availability. For now, apps can only go so far. Good employers still need to hash important matters out with their subordinates based on face-to-face discussion and experimentation. Therefore, they should focus on strengthening their data privacy policies and offering direct channels through which staff can raise concerns, in order to ensure the highest possible levels of employee engagement. It is important to remember that happy and engaged employees are a company's best customers and their most precious resource. They are most likely to throw themselves into the work of satisfying their clients and fulfilling their organisation's visions - which is great for the bottom line.

At the end of the day, mood meters and feedback apps are unlikely to single-handedly drive up employee retention. It is a fact of the working world that good staff, especially those from the millennial generation, often leave for greener pastures. However, investing in innovative ways to boost employee engagement will go a very long way in ensuring that your office is a positive place to work, and that the staff who do head out the door will highly recommend you to others in the field. **HC**