Take Time to Listen to the "Voice of the Employee"

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If you've spent your life in contact center operations as I have, you're a glutton for information. Wallboards, dashboards. ACD, IVR, CTI reports. Workforce management projections. Business results. Customer satisfactions surveys. You pour over the daily, weekly, and monthly stacks of management reports to discern what's going right – or wrong – with your center. But amidst this mountain of available data, there's a resource that is often overlooked: the Voice of the Employee. There's never been a better time to lend an ear to what they're saying.

Your Supervisors and Customer Service Representatives have a grass roots understanding of how people, process, and technology come together *(or not)* in your center. Employee surveys – whether formal or informal – identify, quantify, group, and pinpoint issues and possible options for further discussion and development. You may be *aware* of what needs to be fixed or changed, but staff is dealing with the issues on a daily basis. They *know* the problems and have worthy ideas on potential solutions. They can help you identify:

- Broken processes and workflows
- Technology gaps and headaches
- Common customer complaints
- Employee concerns – e.g., career path limitations and opportunities
- Limitations with cross- and up-sell efforts
- Regional/site differences that influence workflows, career path options, employee satisfaction and agent retention

Surveys in this context go beyond generic "employee satisfaction" polls that your corporate offices may administer from time to time. You need an approach that is specific to the contact center and the associated working environment. The means through which you gather input will be a function of the size and complexity of your operation, the scope of the issues you choose to address and, of course, time, resources, and budget.

Survey Methods	Benefits	Limitations	Best Fit
Side-By-Side Observations	Quick to implement Sampling hints at areas for formal survey	Feedback confined to a handful of agents/groups Agent/group selection and self-consciousness can skew results	Initial discovery for small to medium center Short time table Ongoing audit
Focus Group	Short implementation time frame Samples larger group in dialog with one another	Vocal participants tend to dominate input Agent/group selection can skew results	Initial discovery for centers of all sizes Short time table Targeted topic(s)
Formal Survey (IVR, web)	Statistically significant results across broad range of employees Responses categorized across sites, groups, and subgroups	Longer implementation time frame Requires survey design and analysis expertise, as well as a tool to gather survey input	Initial discovery for large-scale centers, multi-site operations, and/or high profile projects Development phase for change recommendations

When all the "votes" are tallied, you'll likely find that you've validated your gut feeling on some issues, identified new options for consideration, and uncovered a few blind spots where you've missed the silent majority on key issues. The insights you glean could save you time and money by focusing your energies and resources on the right initiatives. It'll give you a head start on defining requirements for managing the people side of change. And soliciting employee input can be a means to secure buy-in IF you close the loop by sharing findings and your action plan with staff.

As you prepare to dip your toe in the Voice of the Employee waters, give due consideration to using a third party to design and administer your program. While it adds to the cost of the effort, there are clear benefits to an independent perspective:

- Outsiders bring expertise and experience in contact center operations, survey design, and results assessment without an insider's bias and/or hidden agenda.
- Your employees are more likely to express their opinions candidly.
- The process will surface the issues and possible root causes before jumping to conclusions and solutions.