

How to Conduct EMPLOYEE FOCUS GROUPS



Empower Managers With the Tools to
Take Action After Your Employee Survey

Quantum Workplace's software and services help you build an engaged culture

Our suite of engagement analytics tools helps you collect employee feedback throughout the employee lifecycle, so you can make work awesome.



INCREASE ENGAGEMENT

Survey your staff, analyze results, and take action on one powerful platform



DRIVE PERFORMANCE

Align your team with goal tracking, motivate with peer-to-peer recognition, and coach employees in real time



UNDERSTAND TURNOVER

Uncover turnover truths with a 360 assessment and aggregate analysis

Make work awesome.

quantumworkplace.com | info@quantumworkplace.com | 1.888.415.8302

MEET THE

authors



Natalie Hackbarth

Engagement Content Coordinator

With a background in journalism and mass communications, Natalie partners with engagement experts to create smart and informative resources that you can leverage to increase employee engagement. On the side, she manages Quantum Workplace's social media accounts and contributes to the blog.



David Weisser

Director of Consulting and Analytics

David is Quantum Workplace's senior researcher. With a degree in political science and a master's in survey research, David is responsible for evaluating and presenting employee engagement survey data to clients. He helps organizations make data-driven decisions, educate and empower their leaders, and increase engagement.



C^{⚙️}ONTENTS

05

INTRODUCTION

08

THE MANAGER, THE MODERATOR

11

5 STEPS TO EFFECTIVE
FOCUS GROUPS

21

5 COMMON DISASTERS AND
HOW TO HANDLE THEM

27

CONCLUSION

28

THE PRINTABLE DOS AND DON'TS
REFERENCE SHEET



INTRODUCTION

You've collected employee feedback, analyzed results, and now what?

It's time to implement a strategic survey follow-up plan. A follow-up plan that leverages employee opinion to help determine the next steps for action. A follow-up plan that is proven to increase employee engagement.

It's time to conduct an employee focus group.

Why Is Engagement Survey Follow-Up Important?

When you roll out an employee engagement survey, you collect invaluable employee feedback – concrete, tangible, actionable data that gives you a real look at what’s going on in your organization. Then, you can use that data to increase engagement and unlock business potential.

And your managers hold the key.

Quantum Workplace research shows that manager survey follow-up matters. On average, employees who said their managers followed up with their most recent employee engagement survey were six times more engaged than those who said their managers didn’t follow up.

Worse yet, employees who said their managers didn’t follow up experienced a six-point decrease in an overall engagement score from the previous year.

Are your managers increasing or decreasing their team’s engagement?

Employees who said managers followed up with them post survey were **6x more engaged.**

Educating Managers: An HR Responsibility

If your managers are following up with their employees post survey, how do you know they're doing it effectively? It's your responsibility to make sure your managers are skilled and trained on how to effectively follow up with employees in order to increase engagement.

Depending on the size of your organization, you could be wasting a ton of time and resources training a handful or hundreds of managers on how to properly follow up with their employees. Some of you might have to:

- Spend hours researching survey follow-up best practices
- Conduct your own group training sessions
- Hold multiple one-on-one sessions to train managers individually
- Travel to various branches or locations to educate managers on survey follow-up
- Answer the same manager questions over and over again
- Create leave-behind pieces to recap your follow-up training sessions
- Provide template materials for managers to reference during feedback sessions

All of that on top of your daily responsibilities? That's a lot of work.

Leverage this ebook as a comprehensive, yet simple guide to help you educate your managers. The content will help you equip your managers with the tools they need in order to follow up with their employees and increase employee engagement after your survey.





THE MANAGER, THE MODERATOR

Managers are the team leaders and focus group moderators. You're the go-between for your leadership and employees. As the moderator, your organization relies on you to help make the connection between the current state of engagement and the aspired state of engagement. Your organization needs you to meet with employees, determine plans for moving forward, and report back to leadership.

**This ebook
will cover
this!**

In order to drive employee engagement at your organization, you need to:

1. Understand organizational culture
2. Know your team's engagement data
- 3. Conduct an employee focus group**
4. Report insight to leadership and recommend changes
5. Make changes based on employee feedback

What Survey Follow-Up is Really About

Before we can understand what survey follow-up really *is*, let's start by addressing what it *isn't*.

Employee engagement survey follow-up IS NOT about:

- Guilt-tripping employees to recant their responses
- Debating which employees opinions are *right* or *wrong*
- Changing employee opinion
- Persuading employees of alternate points of view
- Convincing employees the organization is right and they're wrong
- Targeting which employees said negative things about the organization



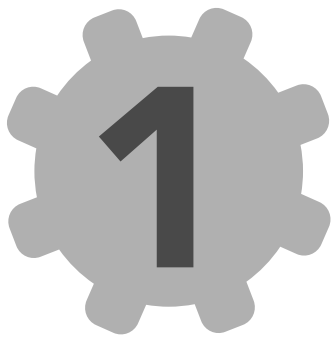
Survey Follow-Up is Just a Conversation

Survey follow-up is really about having a conversation with your people after an employee engagement survey. In that conversation, both leaders and employees should examine detailed survey results, converse about where to improve, and discuss the best way to go about it.

Employees are talking about this stuff whether your organization engages in survey follow-up or not. The question is what are you doing to actively manage those conversations?

For simplicity sake, let's call these managed conversations employee focus groups. The following sections will provide you with tips, how-to's, and detailed examples, so you can conduct an effective, engagement-increasing focus group.

Three Must-Know Moderator Rules



It's Not a One-And-Done Kind of Thing

If you're only going to conduct a post-survey focus group once, it'd be better not to do it at all. As a manager, the last thing you want to do is raise employee hope and expectations and then disappoint when you discontinue the conversation. Use these meetings to promote engagement throughout the year, and engage employees in at least one session per quarter.



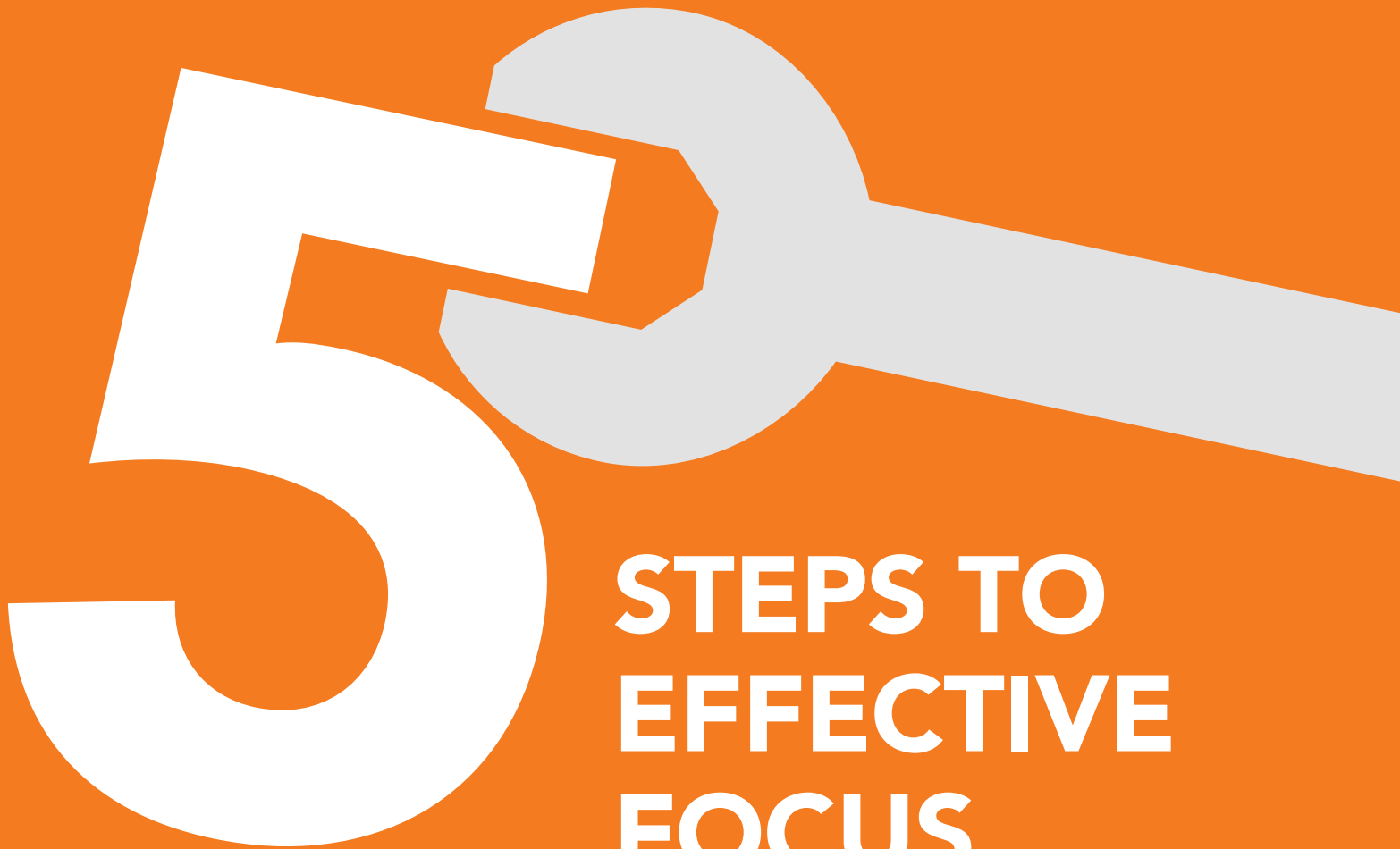
It's Not About You

Leave your opinions out of the discussion. While you want the employee discussions to conform to the boundaries of your meeting strategies, you don't want to overpower their genuine feedback. Take an objective approach to avoid swaying employees with your own leadership bias. This will also help you steer clear of a 'leadership vs. employees' situation, which can work against your efforts and actually decrease engagement.



Leave Your Pride at Home

Receiving feedback in an employee focus group requires a touch of humility on your part, which is often difficult for managers. By hosting this focus group, you humbly admit that you don't have all the answers, and you need your employees' help to get them. Prepare yourself to hear comments that might aggravate or offend you, and take it for what it's worth – honest and helpful feedback. Avoid defensive language and behavior at all costs.



STEPS TO EFFECTIVE FOCUS GROUPS

Now that you understand the importance of survey follow-up and what it's really about, it's time to take action. Here are five steps that will help your managers conduct an efficient and effective employee focus group.

STEP 1

Announce the Meeting

Before you can conduct a successful and engaging employee focus group, you need to inform your employees. Send an invite that covers the logistics such as, why you're meeting, when and where you're going to meet, who should attend, and the ground rules. Your invite should cover the following:



When and Where

Choose a date and time that works best for your employees. For example, if your employees' workloads tend to get lighter as the week progresses, schedule your focus group on a Thursday or Friday. Or if you allow flexible schedules to avoid rush-hour commutes, host the meeting in the middle of the day. A catered in-office lunch always goes over well.

Be clear about when and where you're conducting your focus group so no one gets misinformed. Encourage employees to add it to their calendar so they don't miss the opportunity to share their opinion.

Be realistic about how much time the focus group will take. Ask your employees to block off 90 minutes, just to be safe.

STEP 1

This section of your meeting invite will set the tone for the entire focus group process. Be realistic when you address survey results, and express positivity in your plans for improvement. Let employees know you need and value their input.

Why

Let your employees know that this meeting is being held to follow up with the organization's recent employee engagement survey. Explain that the meeting will serve as a focus group where employees can have the opportunity to impact actions that will be taken as a result of the engagement survey. Be humble; let them know you and the organization need their feedback.

After you explain why you're holding the focus group, give employees a general idea as to what will be discussed. Do this by providing a quick overview of survey results. Don't go into too much detail, just bullet out a few key items like:

- High-level category scores
- Response rate
- Most favorably rated items
- Least favorably rated items
- Low category scores

Recruit a Focus Group Coordinator

As the moderator of your employee focus group, it's your job to designate the focus group coordinator – the note taker. In your meeting invite, ask if any employees would be interested in the role. Include the job description for the focus group coordinator:

- Be present at each focus group meeting
- Take detailed notes on the discussions
- Participate in discussions
- Send meeting notes to the moderator

**STEP 1**

Lay Out the Ground Rules

Every productive employee focus group has a list of ground rules. Decide what your ground rules will be and include the list in your meeting invite. If employees can't follow the ground rules, they shouldn't attend the meeting. Here are some common ground rules for employee focus groups.

#1 Everybody Talks

All opinions are welcome and worthwhile. Speak your mind, agree, disagree, or challenge an opinion expressed in the focus group – one person at a time.

#2 Everybody Listens

Think Golden Rule. Listen to others' opinions, as you would want them to listen to yours.

#3 Be Respectful

We're all on the same team, working to accomplish the same end goal. Don't be rude, judgmental, or condescending. It's not productive, and it's not cool.

#4 Mind the Moderator

My job is to conduct this focus group as efficiently and effectively as possible. Please show me respect.

#5 Give it Your All

This meeting is your chance to impact your own work experience. The outcome will be worth the time and effort it takes to participate.

STEP 2

Begin the Meeting

Sometimes, the hardest part about conducting an employee focus group is getting started. Here are some talking points and a sample script to help you get the ball rolling.



#1 Start the Meeting

Begin your focus group by officially announcing the start. State the name and start time so your employees know they're in the right place.

"Hi, everybody. Thanks for coming to our employee engagement focus group. It's just about 9'oclock, so we'll go ahead and get this meeting started."



#2 State Key Roles

Let employees know who has assigned roles.

"As your manager, I'll be the focus group moderator. Joe will be the focus group coordinator, taking notes on our discussion."



#3 Recap the Rules

Briefly review the focus group ground rules. Ask if there is any clarification needed.

"Before we get started, I want to make sure everyone understands the focus group ground rules. Does anyone have any questions on those?"



#4 Ignite the Fire

Use a compelling opening statement to inspire your employees. Explain why you're here and what you all plan to accomplish.

"The reason we're here today is because we have a chance to impact our own work experience. Whose job is it to create and maintain a positive and fulfilling work culture? Ours – all of ours. We are the organization, and it's up to us to make it the most engaging place it can be. We share that responsibility; that's why we're here today. Awesome Corp. is investing time and effort so we can go through this process. So let's have fun with this, and let's make work awesome."



STEP 3

Communicate Survey Results

Once you've kicked off your employee focus group, dive into your survey results. What results you choose to share with your employees will differ for each organization. However, your approach as to how you communicate those results should be similar. Here are some guidelines on how to share engagement survey results with your employees.



Always ask for questions:

After each data slide, ask employees if they have any comments or questions. If employees seem quiet, warn them that you'll be asking direct questions during the discussion.



Be Open

The most important component of communicating survey results is openness. Make sure every statement is the cold, hard truth. Don't try to frame results to make them seem better or worse than they are. Your employees know the truth, and lying will only disengage them.



Be Objective

Stay objective when you present survey results, both in your language and tone. If you communicate your personal thoughts about the results, you might sway employee opinion and steer your focus group off course.



Be Clear

Survey results can be difficult to present and even harder to understand. Be as clear and concise as possible when you share the results with your employees. Avoid too much commentary to limit questions and confusion.



Be Inviting

Invite employees to comment as you discuss survey results. When employees feel that you're talking *with* them instead of *at* them, they're more likely to open and share their honest opinions during discussion.



STEP 4

Employee Discussion

After you've shared the survey results, open the floor for employee discussion. Spark conversation by asking a few opening questions, like:

- What is your take on the survey results?
- What are we doing well?
- Where should we improve?
- How do we improve in that area? What initiatives could be implemented?

Let your employees take over the conversational reins. Leverage the best practices on the next few pages to facilitate discussion.



Ice Breakers

Ice breakers are fill-in-the-blank statements that can be used at any point during the discussion – to get the ball rolling, when conversation stalls, or if tension arises. Probe employee responses with follow-up questions. Here are some sample ice breakers:

- At Awesome Corp., the one thing I'm most thankful for is...
- One thing I'd really like to change about my job is...
- One thing about this place that could be better is...
- One thing I want explained to me is...
- In the past six months, when I think about what really went well, it was...
- In the past six months, when I think about what really didn't go well, it was...
- I think this survey will...
- Another item I would like to have had on the survey was...

STEP 4

Engaging Activities

These activities might sound elementary, but they help participants to relax and access their creative side, which ultimately creates a better feedback session.

5

Timeline Activity

As a group, plot out your success over the years on a timeline. Ask questions like:

- Are we growing or shrinking?
- What are some major milestones in our organization's or department's history that were markers of progress or setbacks?
- What about for each of you personally?
(Answers don't have to be work related.)



Culture Activity

As a group, attempt to personify your culture. Ask questions like:

- Do we have any language or customs that are unique to our organization?
- What about songs that might have special meaning?
A theme song?
- What places on or off the grounds do employees frequently visit?
- Do we have any sayings? Jokes?
- Are there any employee groups not related to work, like league sports teams?

STEP 4

Written Exercises

Written exercises are a great way to collect opinions from every participant, especially if conversation isn't flowing or you have an employee that is dominating the conversation. Read off your highest and lowest survey items, and ask employees to rank them on a scale from one to six (one=strongly disagree; six=strongly agree). Then, read each statement aloud one at a time, and have employees form groups based on ranking. Have each group share their point of view, and open the topic up for debate. Here are some sample statements:

- I believe Awesome Corp. will be successful in the future.
- I trust the leaders of Awesome Corp. the set the right course.
- Awesome Corp. benefits not typically available at other organizations.
- The leaders of Awesome Corp. value people as their most important resource.



Breaks

Sometimes you just need a break. Consider taking a break if:

- The conversation is at a lull and other best practices haven't helped.
- You detect there are hurt feelings.
- A debate is turning into an argument, and employees are dishing out personal attacks.
- You've been meeting for over an hour straight.

STEP 5

Close the Meeting



Thank employees for their time.

At the close of the meeting, personally thank employees for their time, participation, and valuable feedback.



Confirm that the focus group coordinator took detailed notes.

Make sure you have detailed notes on the discussion, and ask the focus group coordinator to send you them after the session.



Review key discussions and your next steps.

Recap discussion trends and explain your next steps for action (i.e. submitting notes or meeting with leadership).



Preview next focus group meeting.

You might not know the exact date and time of your next meeting, but give employees a general timeline. It's suggested that you conduct employee focus groups at least once a quarter.



Regardless of how well you or your employees thought the session went, you'll have the opportunity to try again. Learn from what worked well and what didn't. With time and practice, you'll become a better moderator, and employees will become better participants. Work to make employee focus groups an engrained part of your culture, so you and your employees together can positively impact work experience at your organization.

WATCH OUT!

5 COMMON DISASTERS AND HOW TO HANDLE THEM

Most employees that participate in engagement focus groups are grateful for the opportunity to be there and voice their opinion. Like you, they want the meeting to run as smoothly and efficiently as possible so they can return to a better and more awesome workplace. However, there are various situations that could arise that will halt your productivity and take your focus group off course. Below are four common toxic situations and how to diffuse them.

Non-Productive, Disruptive Outbursts

WATCH OUT!



THE SITUATION

Joe is trying to make a sincere point.

Whenever I call over to one of the other locations, I feel like I'm not given the courtesy I deserve. I know they're busy and everything, but...



JOE

Suddenly, for no apparent reason, Jim interrupts with a random, non-productive, and disruptive outburst. Maybe he pretends to make a phone call and says,

Or maybe he gives his best valley girl impression and says,

I know, right? Like OMG ..totally.

Hi, yes. I'd like to order some carry-out.



JIM

Why They Do It

They're nervous. More often than not, when employees have non-productive outbursts, it's their nerves talking. This process can be somewhat intense and nerve-wracking, and they're probably just looking for an outlet to release the tension.



What You Should Do

When you're going over the focus group ground rules at the beginning of the meeting, address non-productive outbursts. Ask that participants keep them to a minimum – even if they're funny. If you have a participant who is prone to non-productive outbursts, have a casual conversation with him or her before the meeting. If outbursts continue to be an issue throughout the meeting, kindly remind people that your time is best spent having constructive conversations, and disruptive outbursts are disrespectful to the rest of the group.



Sidebar Conversations

WATCH OUT!

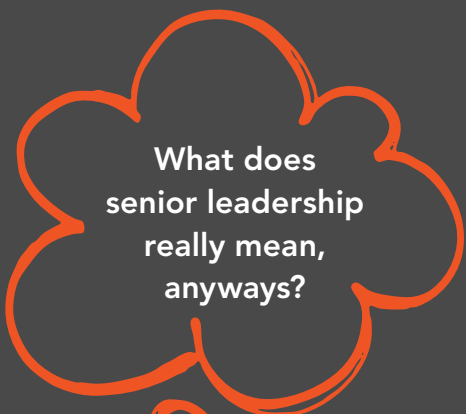


THE SITUATION

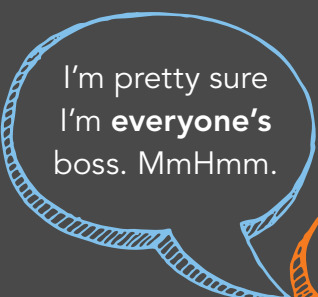
While reviewing data about senior leadership, Joe points out that that “senior leadership” might be interpreted differently among different employee groups.

This comment causes employees to turn and ask one another who they considered to be senior leadership. As more people get involved in separate conversations, the volume begins to rise. Your employees start talking about how the results might be different if a more precise set of questions were asked.


Before you know it, employees start wondering if any of this stuff really matters.



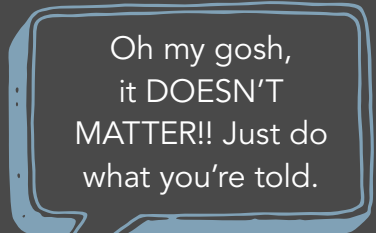
What does senior leadership really mean, anyways?



I'm pretty sure I'm **everyone's** boss. MmHm.



Well let's see... you need to have been here forever and tell people what to do.



Oh my gosh, it **DOESN'T MATTER!!** Just do what you're told.



JOE

Why They Do It

They're curious. The subject is complex and interesting to them, so it's natural for employees to voice their questions, doubts, and concerns.



What You Should Do

Address the fact that the issue of discussion is debatable. Reassure employees that it's a valuable concern that should be brought to leadership's attention; however, due to time restrictions, you need to move on.



Personal Arguments

WATCH OUT!

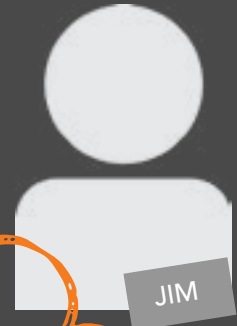


THE SITUATION

Joe thinks the recent changes to product branding have been less than successful.

I think the way we used to communicate our product offerings was way better. This new phrasing is too different...

If it isn't broken...



Jim, who headed the project, defends the new messaging.

That's the reason we changed it, Joe. We want people to think differently. It'll just take some getting used to.



Out with the old!

Each continually tries to make his case in a back-and-forth argument. Members of the group pick sides and join the debate; others start to feel uncomfortable.

Why They Do It

They're human. It's natural to get defensive when someone questions your work. They might even feel as if they're being attacked, which is common in focus groups or situations where people feel exposed.



What You Should Do

Let both sides voice their opinion, and thank them for their contribution to the discussion. Reassure that the focus group coordinator has taken notes, but in the interest of time, you need to move on.



Overly Personal Example **WATCH OUT!**



THE SITUATION

Jim recounts a particular situation regarding the hiring of a new team member in his department.



The job wasn't even posted. And people in my department wanted to apply for it. I've been working here for more than five years; I think I deserve the opportunity to apply for any job offered here. And now, we have a boss walking around who doesn't know half of what most of us have known for years.

Why They Do It

They're trying to relate. It's natural for people to try and relate general subjects to their personal lives. Plus, if you create a safe and open environment, participants are more likely to share more vulnerable examples.



What You Should Do

React to the idea stated, not the person who stated it. If one participant voices a concern, it's likely that others have had the same concern at one time or another. Address the main concern and encourage discussion. Say something like, "It sounds like when the organization has a job opening, it's not always publicly posted. Has anyone else experienced a similar situation? Are there any circumstances where that would be appropriate?"

The Dominant Participant **WATCH OUT!**



THE SITUATION

Joe appears to be dominating the entire discussion. He shares his opinion first or most often, shadows conflicting opinions, or interrupts other employees to get his point across.

Here's my idea...

Billy never responds to emails.

Yeah, that happens to me all the time.

As if!

I don't do it that way.

One time, at this conference...

Is it lunch time?

Always talk to Suzanne when that happens.

JOE

Why They Do It

They're passionate. When an employee dominates the discussion it's because s/he cares about the topic being discussed. Chances are, the employee isn't intentionally overshadowing coworkers or oppressing ideas.



What You Should Do

While you want to encourage employee participation, this person is (inadvertently, or not) stifling the conversation. If you're unable to contain the individual with body language or an occasional glance, say something like,

That's an interesting point, Joe. But let's give other employees the chance to voice their opinions as well.



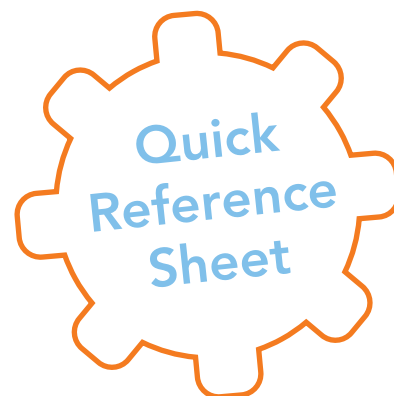
CONCLUSION

You've successfully conducted an employee focus group post engagement survey, but you're not done yet.

Increasing employee engagement in your organization is an ongoing process that must be nurtured throughout the remainder of your survey year. After you've decided on plans for action, you need to implement those initiatives, gauge their success, and adjust when needed.

For the most effective survey follow-up, conduct your employee focus groups quarterly. Add the group sessions to a shared calendar to inform employees of upcoming meetings, and hold yourself and employees accountable to following through on actions that come out of the focus groups.

Focus Group Dos & Don'ts



Here's a quick list of dos and don'ts to reference during your employee focus group meeting.

DO

- ✓ Encourage participation
- ✓ Be an active listener
- ✓ Take breaks
- ✓ Have a sense of humor
- ✓ Accept criticism
- ✓ Ask questions
- ✓ Coordinate
- ✓ Utilize time efficiently
- ✓ Separate yourself
- ✓ Be realistic when presenting results
- ✓ Lead discussion
- ✓ Let discussions progress and change
- ✓ Practice humility
- ✓ Play devil's advocate
- ✓ Reiterate points of view
- ✓ Keep the discussion moving
- ✓ Stay objective

DON'T

- ✗ Let individuals dominate discussion
- ✗ Be a quiet bystander
- ✗ Waste time
- ✗ Get too silly or goofy
- ✗ Get defensive
- ✗ Provide answers
- ✗ Dictate
- ✗ Go over time allotted
- ✗ Create an 'us vs. them' situation
- ✗ Sugar-coat results
- ✗ Steer discussion in favorable direction
- ✗ Let discussions steer off course
- ✗ Play dumb
- ✗ Shut down any ideas
- ✗ Pick a side
- ✗ Make employees feel shorted
- ✗ Push your opinion



Influence Managers to **Act** on Your Employee Survey

Increasing engagement after your employee survey starts with manager follow-up.

Quantum Workplace can help you:

- Conduct an employee engagement survey
- Access and understand in-depth engagement results
- Deliver a presentation of results and recommendations to managers
- Empower managers to take action will follow-up tools
- Provide managers with advice and resources for improvement
- Track which managers are taking action post survey
- Increase employee engagement



Talk to one of our engagement specialists today to receive a free consultation on your engagement strategy.

[LEARN MORE ▶](#)

[SCHEDULE A DEMO ▶](#)