

The real-time revolution: how continuous measurement and listening can transform internal communication.

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01

The changing world of work.

'Change' is the day-to-day reality for many organisations. Whether it's new acquisitions, new structures, new locations, new technologies, or new ways of working: the world of work today is often very different to what it was a few years ago. Particularly just before the pandemic.

And this relentless pace of change means that the picture of employee attitudes, opinions and engagement is evolving day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute.

So traditional research methods, such as running an employee survey every one or two years, are now too slow. By the time you've analysed the feedback from your survey and worked out how to address it, the picture has already changed several times over. Businesses need to be more responsive, more dynamic, more agile.

And more than that: employee expectations have changed too. Outside of work they're asked for – and free to share – their opinions in a variety of ways. Completing a follow-up survey after making a purchase. Reviewing a hotel. Sharing an image of a restaurant meal on social media.

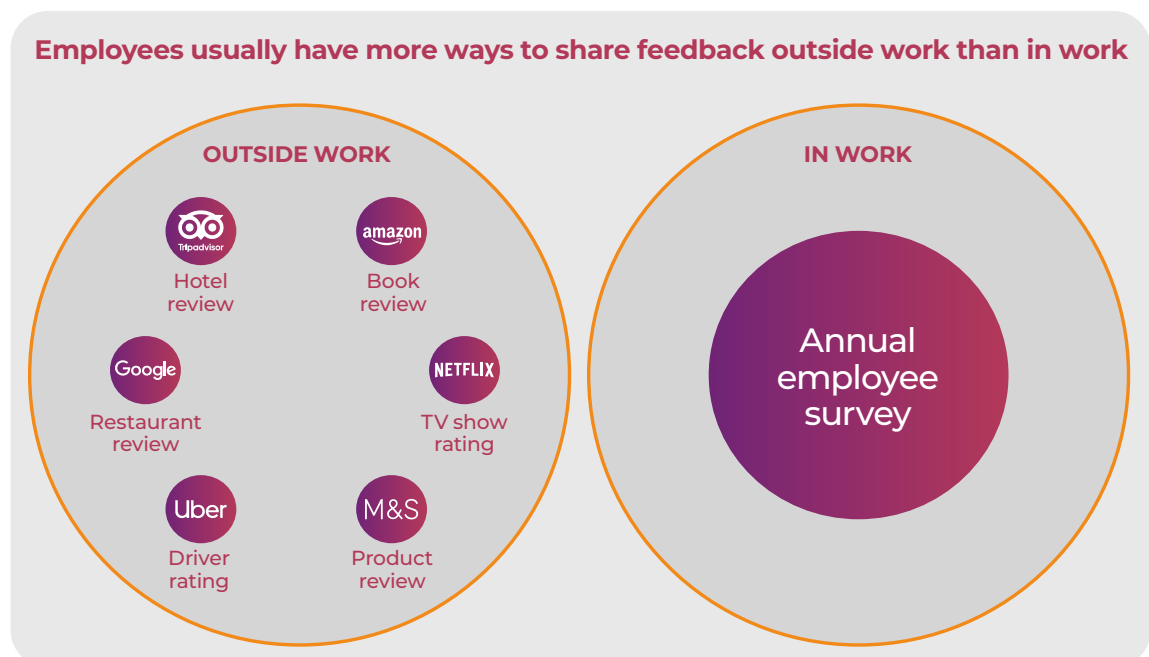
Employees are free to share their opinions in a variety of ways outside work, so it's frustrating when they don't have the same facility at work."

When you can instantly share your thoughts, feelings and ideas in your personal life, it's frustrating when you don't have the same facility at work. And you don't feel listened to.

So re-evaluating your organisation's approach to measurement provides both an opportunity to learn, and a way to mitigate potential threats to engagement.

You can use more frequent, or even real-time, measurement to reinforce your credibility as a function; and to fix minor issues before they become major problems that derail your organisation's business plan.

Employees usually have more ways to share feedback outside work than in work



02 What is real-time measurement?

Instead of collecting data at set times – for instance by running an employee survey once every two years – we can now provide more continuous visibility of the employee experience.

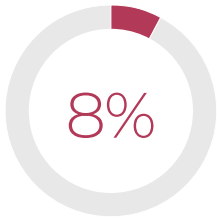
Much of this is thanks to new technologies, but we can't rely solely on digital tools. This isn't about sending out more online surveys and running the risk of creating survey fatigue. It's about treating employee feedback as an ongoing dialogue, rather than as a scheduled event. So we also have to consider our cultural approach to measurement and listening.

And yes, we might well choose to run pulse surveys during and after a strategic campaign. We want to know how our campaign has landed, and show the impact it's had on our business.

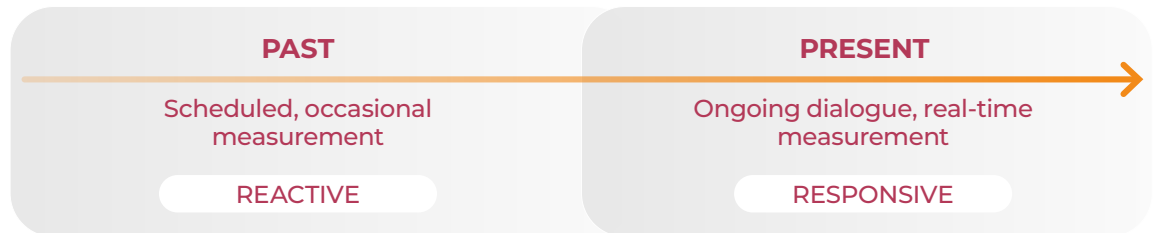
But we can also use 'always on' listening channels too, such as employee forums, social platforms like Microsoft's Viva Engage, or feedback stations at front-line locations.

These channels can help us to capture spontaneous, authentic responses in the moment, rather than weeks or even months later, when that feedback might be of little value. Or when attitudes might have changed, or memories might have faded.

When this approach becomes part of the regular rhythm of your business, it creates a constant cycle of listening, learning, acting and sharing. This makes your organisation stronger, because employees feel their voices are valued, and so builds trust.



Only 8% of employees strongly believe their company acts on feedback (Achievers)



03

The business value.

The ultimate goal of employing an 'always on' approach to listening is to allow your organisation to act more quickly.

To quote an article published by the Reward & Employee Benefits Association (REBA): "By measuring behaviour and sentiment as they evolve, organisations gain a clearer understanding of what employees truly need – enabling more timely and relevant actions across recognition, communication and overall culture."

Rather than waiting until defined moments in the calendar, you can take the pulse of the business at any time.

This understanding can provide the insight you need to refine your comms strategy – whether that's in terms of the overall big picture, or a more specific strategy for a project, such as a campaign. You can adapt to changing priorities far more effectively.

The typical approach versus the ideal approach

SCHEDULED, OCCASIONAL MEASUREMENT



Annual survey



Feedback may be received months after it was relevant; hard to act on



Problems identified too late

ONGOING DIALOGUE



Live dashboard



Immediate visibility of employee sentiment



Faster decisions, faster action

You'll also understand what works and what doesn't, so you can do more of the things that provide value, and less of the others that aren't landing so well.

Similarly, you'll be able to tailor your approach to different audiences, because you'll have greater awareness of the impact of messages and styles on different groups.

And as AI technology develops in the next few years, it's likely that we will be able to use this data not just to respond quickly, but to predict what might happen next. (See Section 8 for more on this.)

But there's even more value to embedding this type of 'always on' approach. The insight it uncovers helps internal communicators to make the most of their time and budget. But also, just the process of listening brings multiple benefits too.

When employees feel listened to:

- They feel seen and valued
- Trust and motivation increase
- The organisation develops a sense of psychological safety (assuming that feedback is responded to)
- Productivity goes up, while absenteeism goes down.

So this is about more than data – it's about strengthening the employee experience. By making listening a continuous practice, you demonstrate that employees' opinions genuinely matter.

This not only leads to smarter communication strategies and more informed decisions, but builds trust, motivation and psychological safety.

04 Research methods.

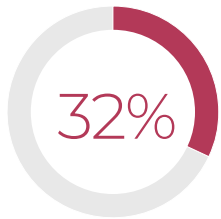
To build a meaningful real-time listening strategy, it's vital to use a variety of research methods. No single method will provide a full picture of your organisation.

Below are 15 ways in which you can improve your listening approach. We've organised them into four categories:

- ① Participation and behavioural
- ② Direct feedback channels
- ③ Community dialogue
- ④ External insights.

There is no need to apply all these methods: select the ones that are most appropriate, achievable and valuable for your own organisation.

The key is to build a 3D picture of employee attitudes, so that you can learn from trends as quickly as possible, and deliver your communications with more confidence.



Companies using regular pulse surveys see a 32% increase in engagement (Feedback Pulse)

① Participation and behavioural

(Shows how much people are taking part in different activities, and how they engage with them)

- Attendance or participation rates (recognition programmes, L&D activities, CSR, wellbeing apps)
- HR data (recruitment, retention, HR survey responses)
- Platform analytics (views, time spent, search trends, content usage).

② Direct feedback channels

(Shows how people are engaging with communications, and how they feel about them; also collects ideas for improvements)

- Pulse surveys around timely topics (campaigns, announcements)
- Pop-up prompts in digital tools (intranet, newsletters, podcasts)
- Feedback stations (physical postbox, electronic buttons)
- Telephone voicemail box
- Comms diaries (selected employees logging interactions).
- HR exit interviews

③ Community dialogue

(Provides forums for conversation, to understand what's important to people)

- Town Hall feedback (questions, upvotes, live polls)
- Employee forum groups / communication champion groups
- Line manager community
- Conversations in social platforms.

④ External insights

(Widens the conversation, to understand how levels of engagement are reflected in the culture and performance)

- External conversations / reviews (e.g. LinkedIn, Glassdoor, social media)
- Customer or stakeholder feedback.

05

Using the data.

Collecting the data is only the first step; the real value comes from how you translate that data into actionable insight. It's not enough to just invest in listening tools or programmes; you have to take the next steps too – analysing findings, making changes, and communicating a response.

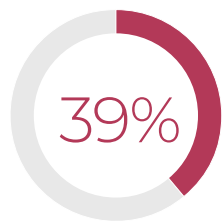
One approach to speed up and simplify the process is to create a visual dashboard that pulls together key data in one place. For instance, Sequel's DASH, our all-in-one analytics dashboard, saves our clients time by collating data from a range of sources and highlighting key factors.

Your task then is to find the trends, patterns and stories in the data; and to use this insight to define your actions. To do that, we recommend asking yourself:

- What is the issue you need to address?
- How do you know this is true?
- Do you need to sense check this with anyone?
- What can you do to address the issue?
- What resources will be needed?
- How will you know that you've succeeded?

Start by looking for patterns over time. Are engagement or satisfaction scores dropping or rising after certain activities? Compare across audience groups to spot differences in how teams, regions or job levels respond to certain approaches.

As with all measurement, it's important to blend quantitative and qualitative methods because this helps you to put the numbers into context. It's not enough to know a number – you need to understand the 'why' as well.



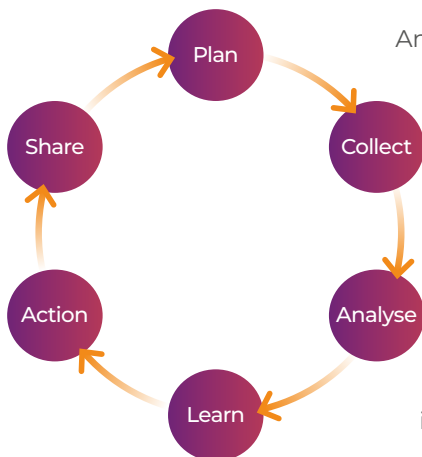
Continuous feedback can lead to a 39% increase in productivity (Gallup)

And crucially, your findings must also be shared beyond the Comms team. Your colleagues in HR and IT will benefit from understanding how employees are feeling and behaving – as will senior leaders.

Again, this helps to reinforce the value of internal communication as a function, because you're using timely insight to guide your decision making. You become a source of intelligence and are able to use that insight to drive the performance of the business.

An equally important step is closing the loop with the wider employee audience. Sharing back what you've heard – and explaining what's being done in response – builds trust and reinforces that feedback is valued.

Not every idea can be acted upon (some may be too ambitious or expensive, or clash with other plans), but acknowledging the feedback demonstrates respect and helps avoid cynicism around feedback going into a 'black hole'. People need to feel appreciated, so that they will continue to share their opinions.



06 Other applications.

Here we've focused on using real-time feedback at an organisation-wide level, to enhance and refine communication strategy.

But the principles can also be applied locally – for instance, managers providing ongoing feedback to their teams.

This example from a CultureMonkey article provides more context.

“Remember using a GPS on a road trip before smartphones took over? You'd punch in the address, start driving, and then – bam – you miss a turn. Instantly, the GPS pipes up: 'Recalculating.' No judgement, no delay, just a quick course correction. Imagine if that GPS waited until you got to the wrong city before letting you know. Nightmare, right?”

2.5X

Companies practising continuous feedback are 2.5 times more likely to drive innovation (Deloitte)

In a similar way to the organisation-wide approach we've been talking about, timely nudges from manager to employee can help everyone to stay on the right path. It keeps employees motivated and focused, and builds an open communication culture.

Waiting until an annual performance review meeting is too slow. Making two-way feedback part of the everyday rhythm of work is much more constructive.

And according to CultureMonkey, employees who receive regular feedback are generally more satisfied with their jobs – they feel supported, and are more likely to stay with their organisation.

There are pulse survey tools designed for this purpose – Microsoft's Viva Pulse is one – but the process can be more organic and informal. You can use daily stand-up meetings or quick weekly check-ins to gauge how people are feeling. And managers can provide instant praise for a job well done, or guidance / feedback when hitting a project milestone.

You can also use aggregated team data from platforms like Microsoft's Viva Insights to understand more about how team members are working. For instance, are they spending too much time in meetings, or are they regularly working out of hours?

Spotting issues early is the key – that could be someone struggling with their workload, a misunderstanding over what's expected of them, or a missed opportunity that could be resolved.

Over time, small conversations build up to create a stronger, more agile team.

07 Managing challenges

While the benefits of real-time measurement are clear, it's important to acknowledge that embedding an 'always on' listening culture is unlikely to be a completely smooth process.

Survey fatigue is a common challenge in all areas of measurement. Most of us are bombarded with requests to rate almost everything we do, whether it's eating at a restaurant, buying an item, or checking in to a hotel. So it's easy for employees to feel overloaded if they're asked for input too often.

To avoid this, use short and focused questions; use a variety of methods; and consider segmenting audiences so that you're not asking everyone every time. It's also crucial to clarify why you're asking; and how the information will be used.

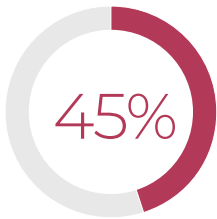
Similarly, you may feel that you're being overloaded with too much data, and the volume of insights is overwhelming. You can use dashboards to collate the information 'behind the scenes' and surface what matters most, allowing you to focus on looking for the stories in that data.

Many organisations listen without responding. If employees share feedback but don't know how that information has been used, then trust erodes quickly.

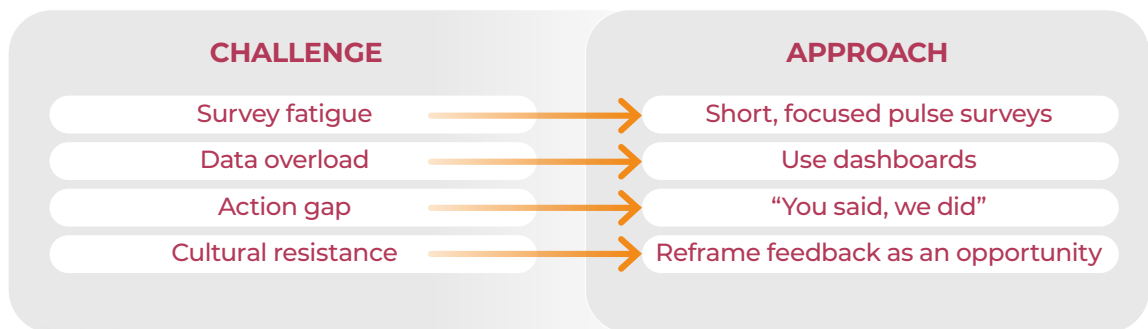
So close the loop with "you said, we did" messaging. Even if the answer is "no", or "not right now", people will at least feel that sharing their opinions was worthwhile.

You might face some cultural resistance as you work to embed an ongoing listening culture. Sometimes people would rather not hear bad news because they worry that their work will be perceived negatively, or that making changes will add to their already-busy workloads.

The key is to reframe listening as an enabler, not a threat. Position feedback as a chance to learn and to improve. Do this by celebrating your successes, and showing where feedback has led to positive changes that have improved the business, and 'helped the boat to go faster'.



45% of employees are more likely to stay with a company that regularly asks for their feedback (Feedback Pulse)



08

What's next?

At the moment the primary aim of real-time measurement is helping you to respond quickly.

Using a combination of the methods outlined in section 4, you can build a rapid picture of what's happened, enabling you to make changes to your comms approach. Perhaps a campaign has landed poorly in one part of the business and you need to address that. Or a particular group has misunderstood an announcement, and needs clarity.

The next challenge will be about proactivity: moving beyond describing events to predicting what might happen next.

Predictive analytics will allow organisations to spot early warning signs before they become major business risks. Perhaps a decline in wellbeing scores that is likely to lead to wider disengagement; or spotting patterns of resistance early in a change programme.

By surfacing these insights as they emerge, communicators will be able to step in with targeted campaigns, support, or resources to address issues before they escalate.

AI is likely to play a significant role here. By bringing together vast amounts of data from multiple sources, it will probably be able to detect patterns more quickly than humans. And even connect those patterns to likely future outcomes. Communicators can then translate these insights into human-centred action plans to respond.

Ultimately this will reinforce the value of internal communication to senior leaders – bringing evidence, foresight and solutions to address the organisation's most pressing business challenges.



09

Summary.

In Formula 1, the car that finishes a season is often significantly different from the one that started it. Teams gather vast amounts of data in real time – from sensors on the car and driver feedback in particular – and use this insight to make continuous, incremental improvements.

If the team waited until the end of season to review that data and make improvements, they would be left behind by the competition.

The same applies to organisations: there is a wealth of data available to us that we can use to continuously refine our communications strategies.

You can start by making small changes and assessing their impact. Here's a simple example: perhaps you've always sent out a global e-newsletter on a Friday afternoon, but people are telling you they often miss it in the rush to complete their work at the end of the week. So try sending it out on a Wednesday morning, and see what the data tells you about that change.

Organisations that thrive in the next few years will be those that treat listening as an ongoing activity rather than a task to carry out at specific periods – learning, adjusting course and building trust by acting on what they hear.

The opportunity is clear. Organisations that create a culture of continuous measurement and listening now will not only improve the way in which they communicate, but also elevate the role of the Internal Communication function as strategic advisors to the business.



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