



# Making employee engagement a continuous conversation



# 01

## Introduction: How often should you ask your employees for feedback?

It's no secret that employee engagement affects business performance. The importance of engagement is reflected by the fact that over two-thirds of all organizations conduct annual employee engagement surveys.

However, these surveys are expensive, yield data that rapidly goes out of date, and produce hard-to-understand results that leave managers rarely knowing how to take action.

So why do them at all? For the simple reason that their importance is indisputable. It's the current approach most companies take that is not conducive to effectively running an employee engagement program.

In this guide we'll discuss the problems of traditional annual surveys, the benefits of more frequent (and shorter) surveys, and how you can begin taking steps to implement a more successful engagement program in your organization.



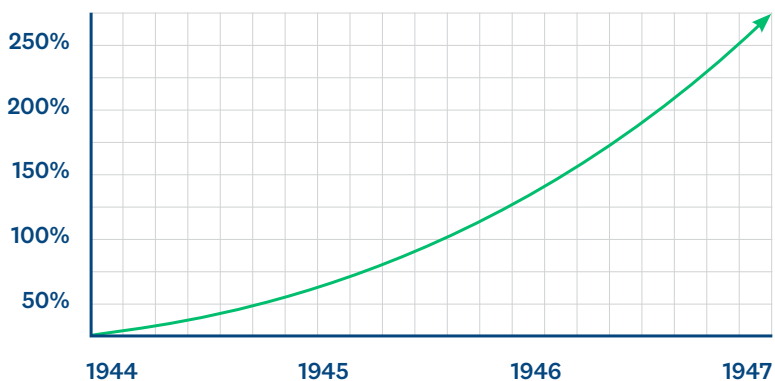


# 02

## “The annual employee survey is dead”— the problems with annual surveys

The annual employee survey has been the traditional yardstick many businesses use to measure engagement since the 1920s. Back then, they were commonly known as “employee-attitude surveys.” Feedback was gathered using printed questionnaires and interviews, then analyzed manually, which was as laborious a process as you might imagine.

Regardless, its usefulness was proven: between 1944 and 1947, the National Industrial Advisory Board saw a 250% jump in companies that chose to conduct these surveys. Across the modern business landscape, not much has changed: companies are still conducting their employee engagement efforts in largely the same manner.



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Today, however, technology streamlines the process of measuring employee engagement, from survey design to deployment and analysis. There's simply no compelling reason you should be checking in on your employees only once a year, especially when doing so could prevent catastrophe. Example: in 1997, only 10 months after receiving overall positive feedback from its annual employee survey, United Parcel Service workers went on a costly strike. Hindsight is 20/20, but it's arguable that more frequent, thoughtful check-ins might have prevented this big blow to UPS's bottom line. Asking employees what they think more often gives them a platform to voice concerns before they turn into real problems.

Another thorny issue with annual surveys (and their even less-frequent cousins, biennial surveys) is their capacity for glaring inaccuracy. The fact is, asking a human being—a complex creature ruled by emotion—how they feel about their workplace only once a year guarantees marginally useful data. Maybe this person is having a bad day when



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## Survey fatigue

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A phenomenon that can be induced by taking surveys that are too long.

they take the survey. Conversely, maybe this employee is normally disengaged, but is in an unusually positive mood at the time of the employee survey. Why? Perhaps the holiday season is approaching, they just got back from vacation, or received their annual bonus.

Regardless, the data you're collecting has significant potential of being unsound, because regular yearly surveys don't account for these and many other variables.

Annual surveys, by their very nature, also tend to be long. The task of filling one out—especially when the question count can creep over 100—induces a phenomenon known as “survey fatigue,” further diluting the quality of your feedback.

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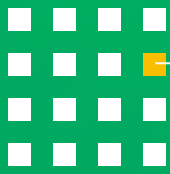
*In many organizations, employee engagement surveys are replacing outdated annual surveys. However... anything related to people should be measured continuously.*

—Inc.com

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This “snapshot” view of a company doesn't provide useful trended data, either. Are employees happier at the beginning of the year or during the summer? Is there a company-wide event that negatively or positively affects morale? There's only one way to find out: increasing the cadence of your employee surveys.

Annual surveys also fail when it comes to gathering data from under-represented employees. Employees come and go over the course of the year, and their tenure doesn't always overlap with annual surveys, meaning their voices aren't heard at all. This is a massive oversight in both high growth and high attrition organizations, where capturing employees' opinions is especially critical to building or improving company culture.



# 03

## Continuous conversation: the benefits of more frequent surveys

We've reviewed the shortcomings of the lengthy annual employee engagement survey. Now let's discuss the advantages of an increased employee survey cadence.

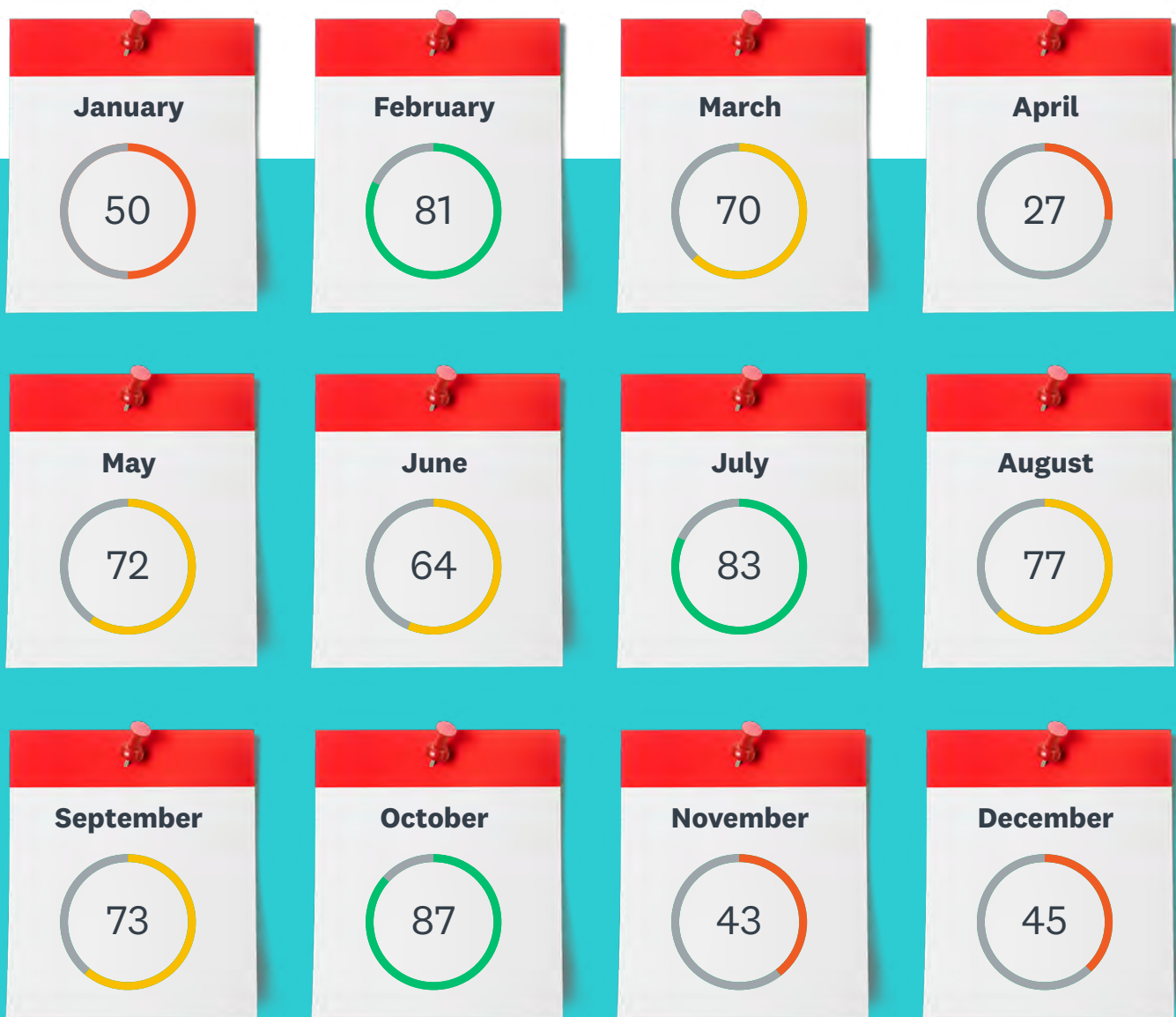
One of the biggest benefits is increased retention. Companies who implement regular employee feedback have turnover rates that are 14.9% lower than for employees who receive no feedback. This also makes sense on an intuitive level: only asking someone for feedback once a year doesn't come across as a genuine effort to provide a better employee experience. More frequent communication often translates into higher engagement, because it demonstrates your company's commitment to driving improvements.

Checking in with employees more often can also reduce the anxiety and fatigue that comes with the annual survey. Why? When surveys are more frequent, they don't have to be long: they can be broken up into bite-size bits, improving the survey-taking experience while providing you with fresher, more accurate data.

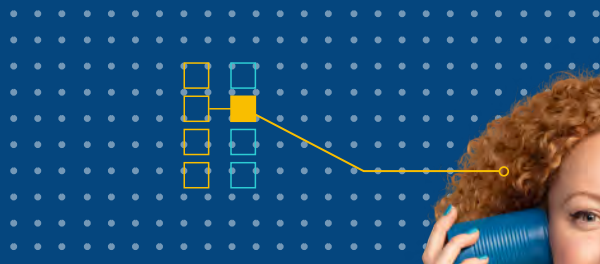


Gathering feedback throughout the year also gives you a clearer picture of employees' relationship with the workplace. You can easily see if certain months or events trend up or down, revealing opportunities to improve engagement throughout the year.

Another invaluable asset is the ability to spot issues before they become major headaches. As evidenced by the earlier UPS example, big problems don't arise on a convenient annual schedule: they can gather steam and boil over much more swiftly.



Engagement can vary throughout the year. How does each month look for your company?



# 04

## How you can adopt this approach

Even if you're convinced that a higher survey cadence is the way to go, you may be hesitant: won't this mean more work for me and my HR team?

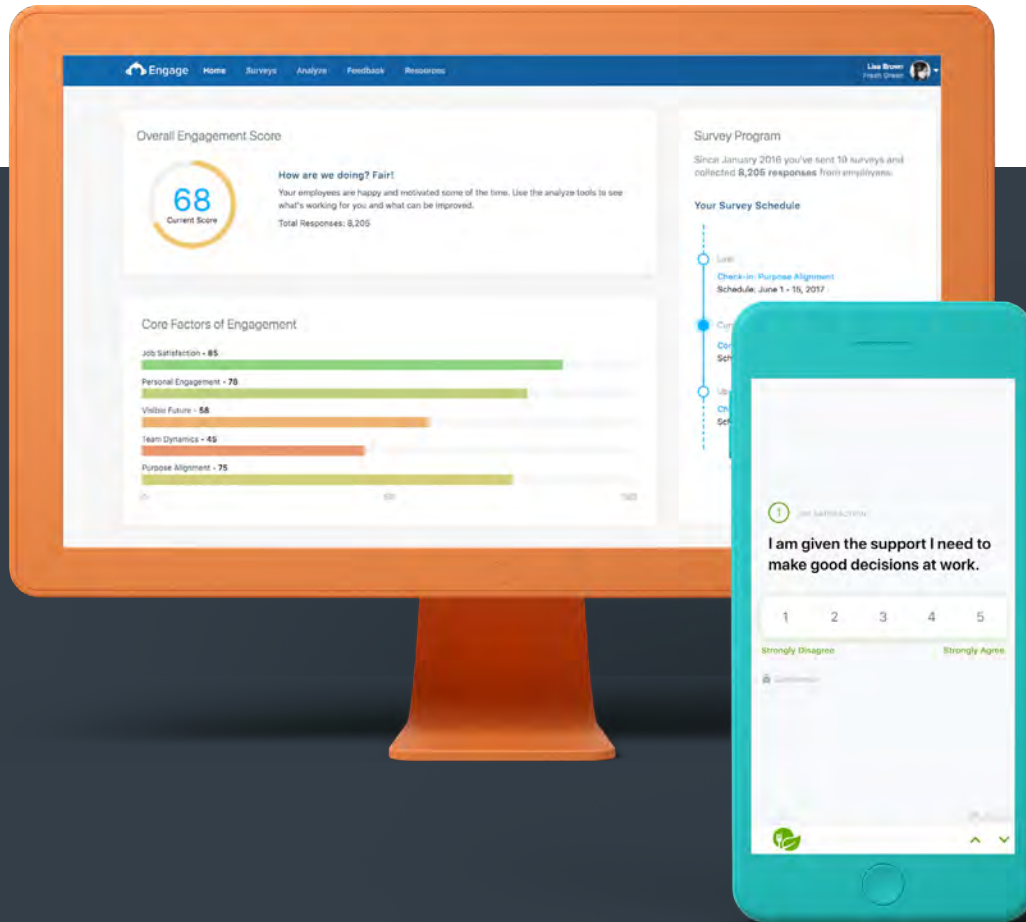
The short answer is no: greater frequency doesn't mean a greater burden. The longer answer is that frequency is about data collection, not reporting out and taking action. It's all about communication, which also means level-setting expectations with employees and leadership.

Telling employees about your new engagement program—that you're invested in giving them a voice, that taking surveys will be easier, that you're endeavoring to improve their experience—will help them know what to expect, and react more positively to it. Similarly, communicating to the leadership team that more frequent data is more accurate, and provides a more stable foundation for actions that drive engagement, helps achieve the alignment needed for a successful employee engagement initiative.





Increasing your team's ability to efficiently collect and process employee feedback may also require a shift in thinking and exploring new means. It may also mean investing in analytics and measurement capabilities. There are many new tools that do this. SurveyMonkey Engage is one end-to-end engagement solution that offers a full complement of features designed to empower your team and improve engagement.



## SurveyMonkey Engage features



Prebuilt, easy-to-take surveys with automated deployments



Powerful data analysis tools that easily surface insights and identify opportunities



A whole-person methodology rooted in social science and developed alongside HR professionals



An Employee Portal that empowers employees to learn, connect, and be a part of the engagement process



Interested in learning more about improving  
employee engagement in your office?

[Check out SurveyMonkey Engage today.](#)