Microsoft Viva

eBook

Building a holistic employee listening ecosystem

A guide to fostering employee engagement and better performance

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Key terms

Concepts used throughout the e-book:

- *Employee listening* is the practice of collecting and responding to employee information and feedback through channels by which employees express their voice, interact, and engage with the organization. It focuses on mutual benefits for both employees and the organization, prioritizing trust and safeguarding individual privacy through data anonymization and aggregation.
- *Holistic listening strategy* refers to a comprehensive, multichannel approach to employee listening that is aligned with and supportive of people and business priorities.
- *Holistic listening ecosystem* refers to an interconnected system of listening channels and capabilities that underpin a holistic employee listening strategy.
- *Listening channels* refer to the channel or source from where employee data and feedback is collected such as, surveys (e.g., engagement survey) and systems (e.g., collaboration and networks).
- *Rhythms of listening* refers to the frequency of listening and data collection such as Programmatic, ad hoc, and always on.

Chapter 1
What is a holistic employee listening strategy?

Employee listening is evolving from a linear programmatic activity to a dynamic always on ecosystem that empowers employees across levels to accomplish more

Employee listening is the practice of collecting and responding to employee information and feedback through channels by which employees express their voice, interact, and engage with the organization. It focuses on mutual benefits for both employees and the organization, prioritizing trust and safeguarding individual privacy through data anonymization and aggregation.

Holistic listening strategies go beyond the traditional programmatic perspective of employee listening, to scale the voice of the employee and democratize workplace analytics.

A holistic listening strategy includes a comprehensive, multichannel approach to employee listening that is aligned with and supportive of people and business priorities. It considers not only the timing and topics of listening but also the various sources, their combined impact, and the unique value they bring to users throughout the organization. Holistic listening empowers employees, managers, and senior leaders with enriched insights and increased accountability. This strategy is underpinned by a holistic listening ecosystem, which comprises an interconnected system of listening channels, rhythms, personas, and capabilities.

A holistic listening strategy is a proven competitive advantage

An effective holistic listening strategy captures a multi-dimensional view of the employee experience by including insights on how employees feel and how they work in the context of organizational priorities, like growth, transformation, or efficiency. When done well, a culture of feedback and action can create an environment that inspires employee engagement while also attaining better financial performance.

Despite the demonstrated value of employee listening, 75% of employees and 80% of managers think their company does not solicit feedback often enough[2]. However, emerging listening channels are helping shift the paradigm to offer valuable, near real-time insights into employee sentiment and behaviors, breaking away from a solely programmatic rhythm of listening, to a rhythm that can meet the speed demanded by the business.

High performing organizations create effective feedback loops across levels, by continually improving their ability to understand, analyze and act on areas critical to their people and the business. By democratizing access to feedback channels and insights, organizations facilitate meaningful change and accountability locally and organization-wide.

In 2022, a year of unprecedented economic instability, the most-engaged organizations showed financial resilience, even outperforming the broader market.[1]

Create an effective feedback loop to become a **high-performance organization**

Assess

Capture direct and indirect data to identify opportunities

Take action

Take data-driven actions that improve engagement and performance

Measure impact

Measure impact to desired business outcomes and continuously improve

[1] Microsoft. The New Performance Equation in the Age of AI, Apr. 20, 2023
[2] Microsoft. Hybrid Work Is Just Work. Are We Doing It Right? Sep. 22, 2022

More listening does not equal better listening

A common mistake in building an employee listening strategy is thinking that more listening, will result in better listening. However, to achieve the right results, start with the key business and people problems to solve and align the audience, content, cadence, and accountabilities accordingly. This requires distinguishing between practices associated with employee listening and employee monitoring. While employee listening is focused on understanding and improving the experience of groups of people, employee monitoring singles out individuals and uses their data in way that does not directly benefit the individual.

Employees at highly engaged organizations are…

40% more likely to have confidence that their feedback will lead to action[1].

56% more likely to say their organizations continually improve processes[1].

Understanding which levers to use, and when to use them, can enable organizations to not just "listen more" but "listen better," creating room for high quality discussions and targeted actions, whether to drive engagement, growth, efficiency, or something else.

The characteristics of a holistic employee listening strategy include:

- A clear purpose, aligned to strategic business and people efforts.
- A holistic listening ecosystem that provides a comprehensive set of channels, and diverse data to drive value from individual contributors to senior leaders.
- A clear set of principles and guidelines on data privacy and transparency, such that data cannot be connected back to an individual, to strengthen employee trust and buy-in.
- A clear path to action taking, focused on people-centric actions that benefit employees and the business.
- A plan for measuring business impact and the ability to make changes, as needed.

[1] Microsoft. The New Performance Equation in the Age of AI Apr. 20, 2023

6 tips to bridge the business and people agenda

To bridge the business and people agenda, connect the dots between the tactical programmatic aspects of listening to strategic business priorities.

Here are strategies to set you up for success:

1 Align to business priorities

Map your listening strategy to business priorities and identify the key questions to answer for the business.

How: *Clearly call out how your strategy will answer the "so what" questions and highlight specific ways your strategy accounts for multiple priorities.*

2 Challenge status quo

Shift the focus from how we compare externally to how can we do right by our business and our people.

How: *Avoid over-indexing on an external benchmark that is unrealistic for a particular metric. Instead, by aligning success criteria to the business strategy, show a vision of what success can look like.*

3 Establish guiding principles

Create a standard for collecting and using workforce data to ensure an intentional measurement strategy. The principles should support decisions for what, when, and how to measure.

How: *Outline the principles and share with the organization (on an internal site, at a townhall, in communications, etc.), including your clear expectations for privacy, access, trust, data integrity, etc.*

4 Engage diverse stakeholders

Identify and stay abreast of key stakeholders across the organization, considering people across levels and functions. To help align cadence, nurture champions of your strategy, and address potential blockers.

How: *Identify and engage diverse stakeholders early on. Create a space and time for people to share their honest feedback about the strategy..*

5 Prepare for pivots

Leave space to shift the measurement strategy to reflect progress, new insights, and the changing business environment when needed.

How: *Establish regular check-ins with key stakeholders to respond to any changes needed and be clear about the channels available for doing so.*

6 Clarify what the strategy won't solve for

Outline the limitations of the strategy to avoid falling into assumptions about the capability of your ecosystem and not being able to deliver on those.

How: *Create a "Not" list. Be clear on the capabilities, analysis, and questions the listening strategy won't solve for., such as being limited by sample size, technical capabilities, data quality, or other issues.*

Uncovering the link between engaged employees and Sage customer satisfaction

Using organizational census survey results in conjunction with customer satisfaction scores, Sage, a leader in accounting, finance, HR, and payroll technology for small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs), uncovered a link between highly engaged teams and productivity. "Focusing on our customer service teams, we were able to see from our organizational census survey data and corresponding customer satisfaction scores that teams with positive engagement scores could take more customer calls and still maintain a high level of customer satisfaction," says Jenny Johnstone, Sage's Senior Director of Culture, Colleague Experience and Engagement.

For a company that routinely achieves customer satisfaction scores of 96% and first-time contact resolution of 92%, an improvement in employee performance means bringing leading-edge experiences to more customers and perpetuating stellar customer service that makes the brand stand out in a competitive market. "We've seen some employees achieve a 10% uplift in their performance and we can link those improvements to organizational census survey scores that prove the link between engaged employees and fantastic customer service results," says Sharon Oley, Customer Services Director at Sage.

> **"Focusing on our customer service teams, we were able to see from our organizational census survey data and corresponding customer satisfaction scores that teams with positive engagement scores could take more customer calls and still maintain a high level of customer satisfaction."**
>
> **Jenny Johnstone**
> Senior Director of Culture, Colleague Experience and Engagement at Sage

Chapter 2
The components of a holistic listening ecosystem

Holistic listening ecosystem

Once you know your people and business priorities, it's time to build a holistic listening ecosystem, including a delivery model and approach to value generation that drives action.

Building a holistic listening ecosystem includes 3 key steps:

1. **Identify your channels and rhythms.** Identify the channels and sources of listening, their cadence, their purpose, and how to incorporate them into your ecosystem.

2. **Define who is a part of your ecosystem and what they value.** Clearly identify stakeholders, the role they play, and how they participate and benefit from the ecosystem.

3. **Connect insights to action.** Outline what access and accountability looks like for different users.

1. Identify your channels and rhythms

- Channels and sources of listening
- Rhythm and frequency of listening

Channels and sources of a holistic listening ecosystem

Listening channels are the pathways through which employees express their voice, interact and engage with the organization. Not all channels are made equal, when it comes to access and scale, there are two main channels: surveys and systems. These channels collect a range of data—both active and passive—revealing a comprehensive view of employee sentiment and behaviors. When combined with context from formal and informal dialogues throughout the organization, your listening ecosystem becomes a rich source of insights, painting a comprehensive picture of your organization's health. Regardless of the channel, pursue listening not monitoring.

The purpose of data collection for each listening channel should be centered on benefits to employees and the business, focused on employee trust. Data should be anonymized and aggregated such that no individual information can be traced back to an employee or be used against them.

Surveys

A source of listening which collects **active data,** meaning direct input from employees, which provide insights into **how people *feel* and what they *think*.**

Example types

Organizational census: a programmatic survey that is sent to the entire organization to gauge overall organizational health and employee experience sentiment and is deployed at a consistent cadence (e.g., bi-annual engagement survey).

Strategic topics: an ad hoc survey that focuses on topics currently impacting a specific target population and, in some cases, the entire organization, typically deployed one time or with a limited recurrence (e.g., hybrid work, change readiness).

Employee lifecycle: an always-on survey that focuses on specific "moments" of an employee's lifecycle with their organization (e.g., candidate experience, onboarding, exit, developmental 360's).

Team pulses: an ad hoc, lightweight survey typically used as a manager or project-lead that can be frequently deployed to teams, such as a follow up to a census survey, or to better understand trends in system data like work habits.

Systems

A source of listening which gathers **passive data,** from internal platforms and common workplace systems, providing insights into **what people *do*.**

Example types

Day-to-day work habits: continuously compiled data on characteristics of employees' day-to-day working habits such as, meeting habits and working hour patterns.

Collaboration and organizational networks: continuously compiled data on collaboration, communication habits, and the interconnectedness between employees and teams.

Social platforms: collect engagement and interactions with communications and thematic topics from internal social forums.

HR systems: systems of record on core HR and employee experience such as human capital management systems (HCMs), applicant tracking systems (ATS), and learning management systems (LMS)

Functional business systems: continuously compiled data on ways that employees are accomplishing business-critical and functional work (e.g., facilities management, customer management, time tracking etc.)

Continuously supported through formal and informal dialogues across the organization

Rhythms and frequency of employee listening

Holistic listening ecosystems combine programmatic (i.e., pre-planned), ad hoc (i.e., nimble and targeted) and always-on (i.e., autonomous and in the flow-of-work) listening frequency.

Pair the frequency of listening to the needs of your organization. A holistic listening strategy should have a planned schedule and rhythm for leveraging different sources of aggregated listening and be nimble to support changing business needs. For example, a department may deploy an ad hoc survey to assess sentiment around a recent reorganization or pull a report on work habits to understand interruptions to day-to-day operations. Similarly, a manager might want to get deeper insights from an organizational census survey to understand what actions would be of most value for their team.

Programmatic

Programmatic means the data is collected within a specified programed period (i.e., clear data collection periods). The cadence can vary from annually to monthly, but it is pre-planned, often recurring and aligned to the rhythm of the businesses.

Ad hoc

Ad hoc means the data is collected on demand and informed by needs of team or the organization. It provides your ecosystem the flexibility to nimbly react to needs of your stakeholders.

Always-on

Always on sources are collected continuously and autonomously varying from weekly to hourly. When using this data, you should define a “window” of time that sufficiently represents the phenomena of interest and relevance to the focal questions (e.g., 90-day periods for system data, or a quarter for lifecycle data)

Surveys

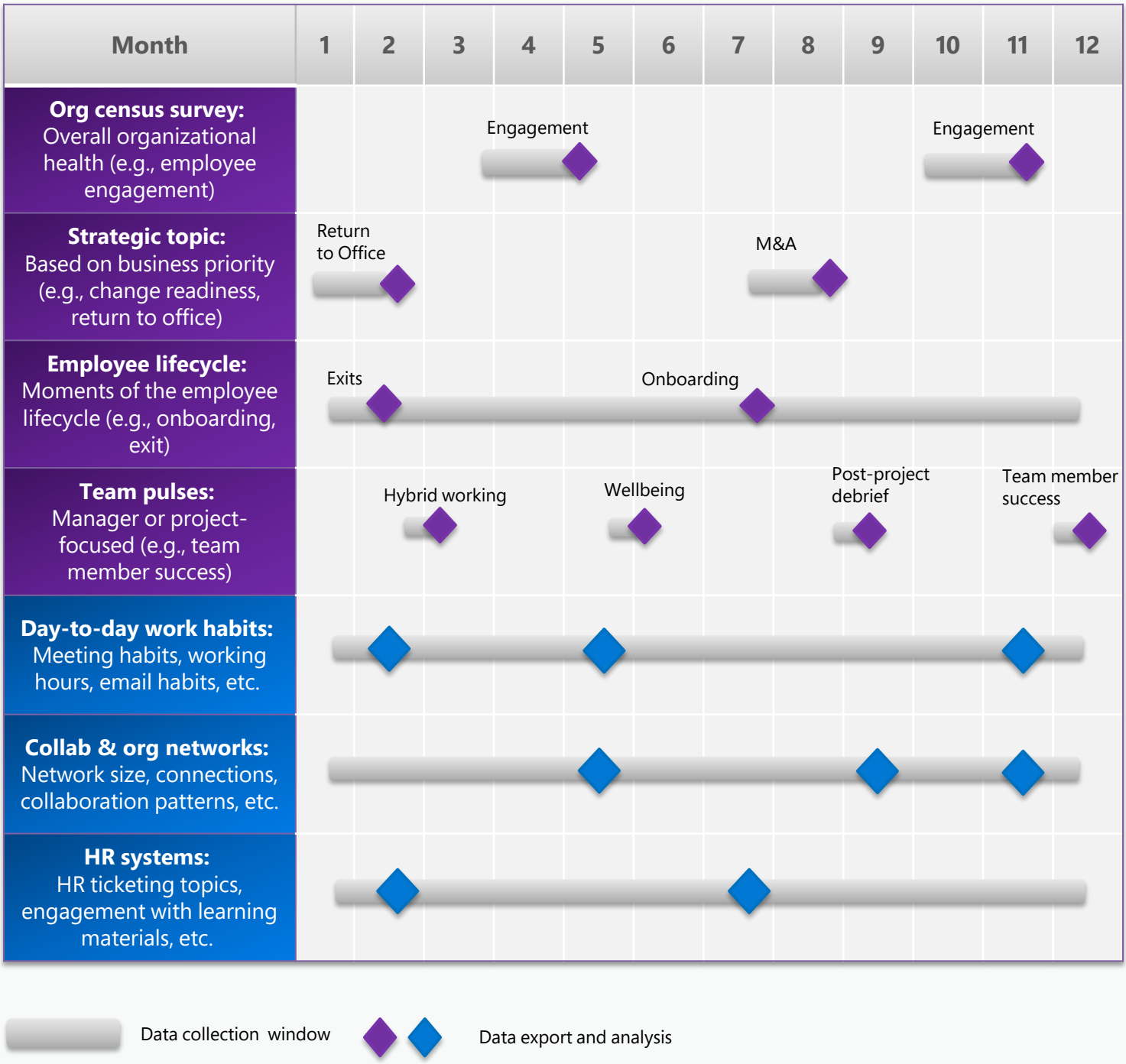
	Org census	Strategic topics	Employee lifecycle	Team pulses
Who	Org wide	Org wide or target population	Individual	Team
When	Programmatic	Ad hoc	Always-on	Ad hoc and Programmatic
Examples	Engagement survey Team effectiveness survey Manager effectiveness survey D&I survey Culture survey	Change Readiness M&A Hybrid readiness Return to office Specific employee experience topics (e.g., facilities, IT resources, etc.)	Onboarding survey Exit survey Leave survey Development 360's Program evaluations	Team member success Manager focus Wellbeing Hybrid working Project team success Post project debrief

Systems

	Day-to-day work habits	Collab & org networks	Social platforms	HR systems	Functional business systems
Who	Org wide or target population				
When	Always-on				
Examples	Working hours Meeting hours Email hours Focus hours Multi tasking hours Meeting hours with manager 1:1	Connections Network size Diverse ties Influence Communication patterns	Internal social networks Internal recognition platform	HCM, Shared services and ticketing LMS and skills platforms ATS and candidate experience	Customer relation management (CRM) Building and facilities management Time tracking

Example of holistic listening channels and rhythms

Illustrative example of leveraging different listening sources. Look for opportunities to combine sources to mitigate survey fatigue and harness the value of the integrated insights of how people feel and what they do. For example, align data analysis from system sources with programmatic surveys to enhance insights and inform ad hoc needs for teams and the business.



2. Identify what your stakeholders want from a listening ecosystem

- Identify and account for stakeholder needs

Identify and account for stakeholder needs

To ensure your ecosystem is delivering value to all stakeholders, it's important to understand their unique needs. Start with the distinct value they will get from the different capabilities provided by the listening ecosystem. Stakeholder capabilities will vary based on data access, level of control, and their ability to utilize ecosystem capabilities for driving action and change. Similarly, the speed at which insights are required will depend on the necessity to make data-informed decisions with speed.

Accounting for individual needs is important because, the individual experiences within a listening ecosystem can impact attitudes towards trust, privacy, and accountability, influencing employees' decision to participate. Establishing clear norms and expectations is crucial for fostering a culture of feedback and accountability.

		HR	Business leader	Manager	IC
	Needs	Understand needs and areas of improvement in the workplace to help inform policies and make org-level decisions	Visibility into org-level people and business needs for prioritization and decision making	Actionable content and insights to support team success	Agency and voice on important topics and moments that matter
Capabilities	Programmatic surveys	x	x	x	x
	Internal social forums	x	x	x	x
	On-demand team pulse		x	x	x
	In-the-flow of-work behavioral insights	x	x	x	x
	Demographic cuts	x	x		
	Historical trends	x	x	x	x
	Correlations & predictive connections	x	x		
	Alerts for significant score changes	x	x		
	Timely reports	x	x	x	

How Microsoft delivers value across stakeholders

HR and business leaders
These stakeholders have direct access to insights with data trends and demographic cuts with internal benchmarks. We also provide compelling visualizations from analyses with multiple variables and suggest recommended actions for them to make an immediate impact.

Managers
These stakeholders receive holistic insights that highlight the sentiment and behavioral work patterns for their teams. These insights are paired with key strengths and opportunities, along with suggested actions. Managers can then create action plans with clear next steps, a schedule for completion, and on-demand check-ins.

Individual contributors
These stakeholders are cascaded insights through leader and manager conversations and community communication channels. We emphasize employee ownership of the opportunity areas through team conversations and action plans. There is also an on-demand opportunity to monitor their own work patterns with the insights for improvement.

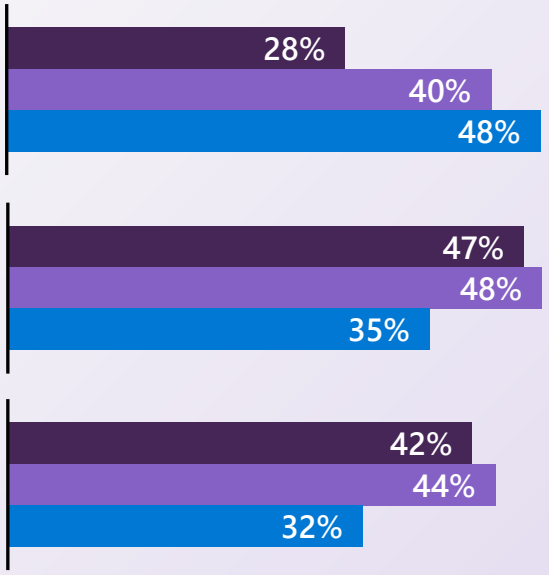
Dante Myers
Director of Employee Listening at Microsoft

Stakeholders get different value from the ecosystem

A study published in Harvard Business Review found that 90% of the 10,000 employees surveyed reported willingness to let their employers collect and use data about them and their work, but only if they benefit in some way[4]. A 2023 sample of US LinkedIn users was asked to select the type of insights that would empower them to do their best work, and the top three insights selected were 1) insights about how their team feels about their work, 2) insights about their team's productivity, and 3) insights about their own productivity[3]. There were also seniority differences in this sample. While directors and managers reported that insights about their *team productivity* would empower them the most, individual contributors responded that insights about their *team's sentiment* would be most empowering.

A 2023 sample of US LinkedIn users was asked to select the type of insights that would empower them to do their best work, and the top three insights selected were 1) insights about how their team feels about their work, 2) insights about their team's productivity, and 3) insights about their own productivity[3].

If you were provided with additional insights about you and your team's work and work experience, which of the following insights would empower you to do your best work?



Insights about how my team feels about their work (e.g., feeling like their work matters)

Insights about my team's productivity (e.g., task progress and impact)

Insights about my productivity (e.g., task progress and impact)

Director+ N = 194 | Manager N = 195 | Individual Contributor N = 303

3 Viva People Science x LinkedIn Market Research Survey, April 2023
4 Harvard Business Review, February 2019: How Companies Can Use Employee Data Responsibly.

3. Connect insights to action

- Empower action at all levels

Connect insights to action for all stakeholders

Maximize ecosystem value by moving from dispersed data to in-the-flow-of-work insights and action.

Map the journey of each stakeholder across listening channels to identify areas to remove friction, focus attention, and increase value. Each source of listening touches different users and varies in its solicitor, contributor, action taker, and impact level.

Solicitor - who is soliciting the data?

Contributor - who is providing the data?

Action taker - who is responsible for taking action on the data?

Impact level - at which level will the action have the greatest impact?

Auditing and mapping your listening ecosystem can help you identify areas where you might have gaps in who you are soliciting feedback from, who is carrying the burden of action, how often you are listening, and the value of each listening channel. The organization, leaders, managers, and teams all have a role to play in acting on listening data.

Audit your ecosystem for connection, leverage, accountability, and privacy

Democratize access to data and ensure action takers are empowered with the right insights and clear expectations. For any listening source consider the cost benefit of collecting the data, consider asking who benefits? Who could be negatively impacted and how do you mitigate this risk? While conducting an ecosystem audit, keep in mind the way your channels not only serve your listening strategy, but safeguard against misuse.

	Source	Type	When	Solicitor	Contributor	Access to data	Action taker	Risk/ benefit to employees	Impact to the business
Surveys	Engagement survey	Census	Bi-annual (programmatic)	• Org	• Entire organization	• Organization • Leaders • Managers • Individual Contributor	• Organization • Leaders • Managers • IC/team	• Benefit: Sense of voice on topics most important to employee's happiness and success at work	• Improving employee engagement • Retaining top performers • Improving manager capability
Surveys	Exit survey	Lifecycle survey	Always on	• Org	• Individuals	• Organization	• Organization	• Benefit: Understand attrition drivers and how to overcome • Risk: singling out departing employees	• Retaining top talent • Identifying cultural barriers
Surveys	Hybrid working team pulse	Team Pulse	On-demand (programmatic)	• Manager	• Teams	• Manager	• Manager	• Benefit: Enable managers to provide more direct actionable support	• Effectiveness of hybrid work habits • Satisfaction with current hybrid set-ups
Systems	After hours collaboration	Work habits	Always on	• Org • System	• Entire organization or specific groups	• Leaders (team level) • Manager • Individual Contributor	• Leader • Manager • IC/team	• Benefit: directly understand and adjust collaboration times • Risk: Potential to single out groups that require more flexible work arrangement	• Reducing burnout • Assessing sustainable work habits • Improving work patterns

Illustrative example

Consider how dialogues can provide additional context to your listening sources, since conversations happen more organically identify in your audit places where you can formalize the dialogue in your ecosystem, (E.g., post org census debrief conversations, exit interviews or listening tours ahead of big policy changes)

Chapter 3
Maximizing the value of your holistic listening ecosystem

Best practices combining data from different listening channels

It's important to remember correlation does not imply causation. When connecting different listening channels to make decisions, consider contextual factors and expect there to be differences across populations.

For example, you may want to better understand the work habits that help create clarity for your employees to integrate into an updated manager training. Depending on the data you connect, you will need to consider whether the insights apply to front-line managers and/or organizational leaders who oversee multiple managers, as their behavioral patterns will differ. Below are four best practices for combining data from different listening channels.

Confirm

Investigate hypotheses about the employee experience by looking at data from both systems and surveys. Explore whether what you are seeing in the survey data and hearing in conversations aligns with what you are seeing in the system data. Some links will be easier to explain than others, but this is where research can help inform common hypothesis to explore.

Example: *Employees with larger networks are more likely to feel included in their team. Employees that have more time to focus share more positive feedback related to their work-life balance.*

Clarify

Add more context to the employee experience by considering differences in system behavior. You may find that survey and system data alone each provide only one aspect of the story. Looking at both together can help to provide more clarity on the lived experience of employees.

Example: *Looking at data from systems alone, it could be easy to assume that after-hours work is harmful. But layering in data from a manager pulse or org-census survey, you may find that after-hours work is a positive practice (to an extent) as it provides flexibility. Based on these insights, you'd want to keep an eye out for the breaking point when after-hours work becomes detrimental.*

Connect to action

Make changing the employee experience feel more tangible. If you see differences emerging in surveys aligning with differences emerging in systems, you can determine what actions are likely to have the most meaningful impact on the employee experience you hope to improve. Take action and communicate broadly the steps taken for improvement.

Example: *If employees with more manager 1:1 time report having clarity on their work, encourage managers to prioritize 1:1 meetings.*

Anticipate

Over time, detect the early indicators, of primary employee experience outcomes. (e.g., engagement, wellbeing, productivity) whether from systems or surveys, This allows you to better anticipate employee needs and deploy early interventions.

Example*. Seasonal trends in focus time and working hours might provide insight into when to provide additional support.*

The power of combined insights for enterprise-wide action at Microsoft

Microsoft's listening strategy focuses on four E's: engage employees, empower managers, enable leaders, and enlighten HR. "We empower the people who empower the planet through an employee listening system that not only facilitates continuous progress in making Microsoft an exceptional place to work, but also drives an evolving culture with a growth mindset," said Dante Myers, Director of Employee Listening Systems at Microsoft.

Microsoft's holistic employee listening ecosystem leverages data from both surveys and systems to provide leaders, managers, and HR with real-time data to inform and guide decisions and actions, while supporting agency and empowerment for employees. With a large ecosystem, they are mindful to proactively address potential challenges. For example, to reduce employee survey fatigue, they emphasize tangible action steps that have been taken to motivate participation. Additionally, they aim to improve data literacy among stakeholders, so they feel empowered to explore and understand the data in a meaningful way.

Case in point – The Microsoft HRBI team decides business priorities based on a three-prong approach: understanding current business and people priorities, evaluating current programs, and reviewing external literature. Recently, they investigated whether there were specific work patterns and behaviors that were preventing employees from being empowered to do their best work.

To conduct their analysis, they took an integrative approach to their ecosystem via connecting active data from surveys and ambient data from systems. They discovered that employees who reported higher work-life balance and time for learning had, on average, 3 hours more focus time per week. As a result of the of HRBI' team's work, leaders and managers were encouraged to recommend that their teams proactively set aside blocks of time for focused work each week to tackle key priorities leveraging Microsoft Viva capabilities. Carving out this time allows employees to engage in deep work and dive into projects without distractions or interruptions. More focus time means more progress, which means less overwhelm. It also means less work spilling into after hours.

As people set aside more focused time, well-being improved. They also discovered that having too many collaboration hours was negatively impacting employee thriving and work-life balance scores. As an intervention, a few organizations at Microsoft implemented a no-meeting day for focus time or work-related learning. Due to this, wellbeing scores improved and the rate of completion of learning courses went up.

Chapter 4
Fostering success with holistic listening

Maximizing the value of your holistic listening ecosystem

The foundational building blocks

Deciding what sources of listening to leverage depends on your needs as an organization. As a foundation, we recommend the following combination of channels and sources: an organization-wide census, lifecycle surveys, strategic topic pulses, and insights on basic work habits. Consider these as building blocks to developing a holistic listening strategy that fits your organization.

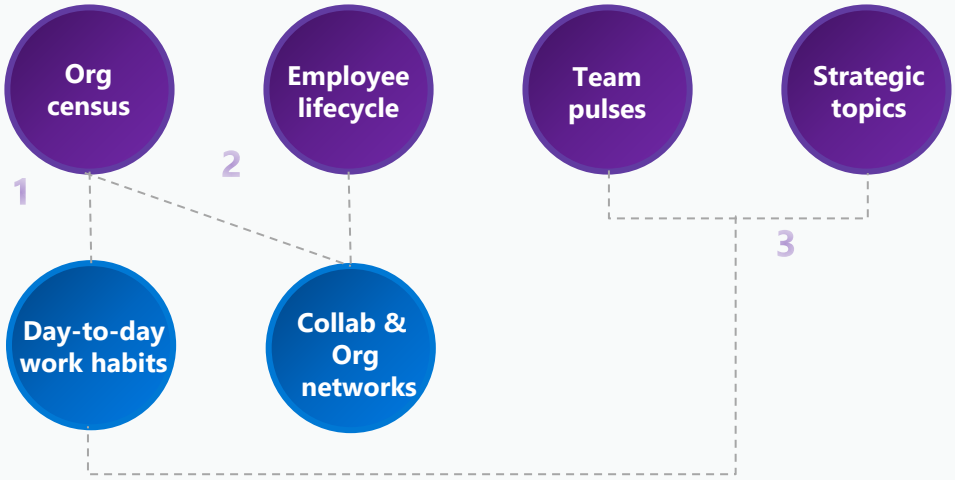
Most organizations are well-versed in survey-based listening channels, fewer are at leveraging system-based listening channels. When starting your journey with system-based listening channels, think about the value it contributes to the ecosystem, the questions it can help answer for different users, how to combine it to gain additional context, and what action is expected as a result.

When working with data from systems, work patterns (e.g., working hours, meeting behaviors) are a good starting point to answer specific questions, such as what constitutes effective meeting habits (e.g., length, quantity, guests). Based on the patterns, you can take specific actions, such as meeting audits and meeting best practices that can be tailored to your organization.

Build on the foundation with strategic linkages

Holistic listening ecosystems effectively combine channels for a comprehensive understanding of the employee experience. An example is pairing employee engagement data with metrics from day-to-day work systems to examine patterns of work related to employee clarity, empowerment, and connection. This analysis could answer meaningful questions about employees' experience at work, such as:

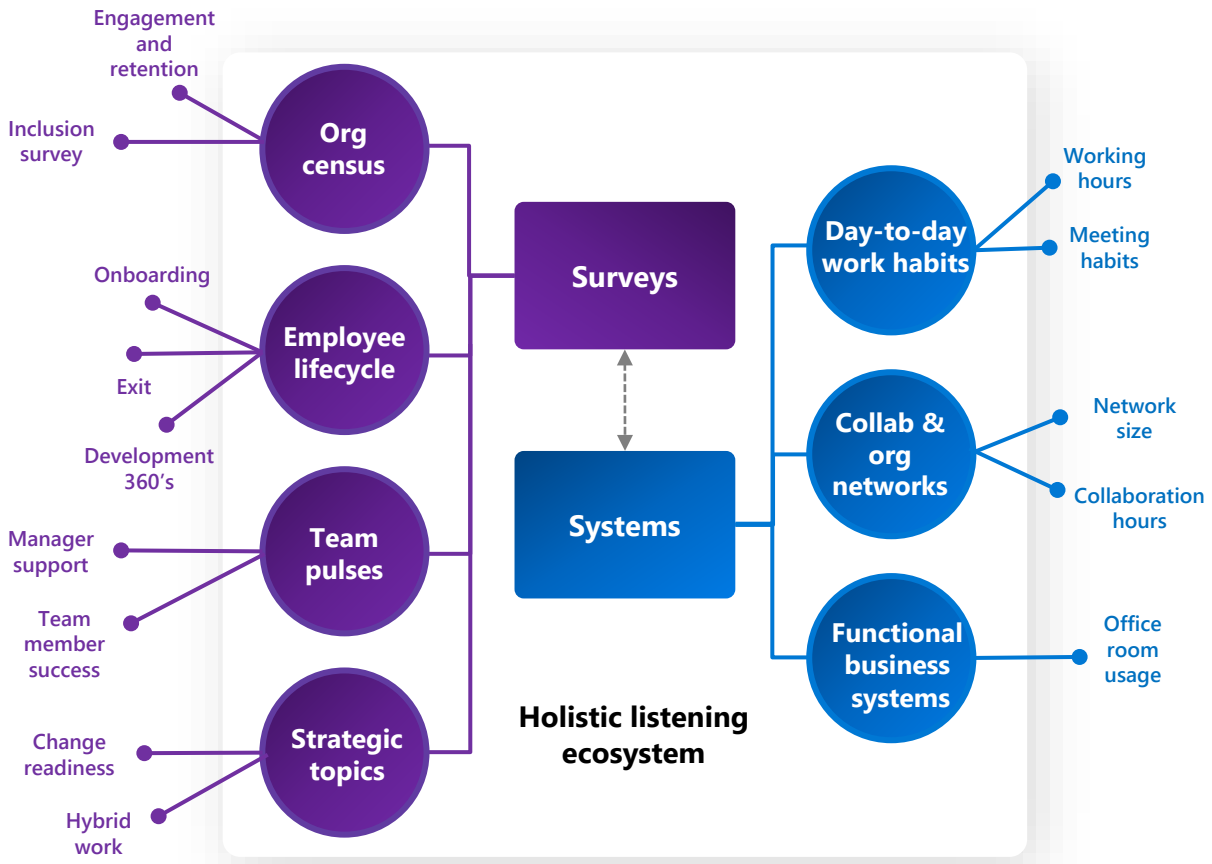
1. Does the amount of time people spend with their managers influence their sense of clarity?
2. How is network size and belonging different for new employees versus those more tenured?
3. How are people's working hours related to their wellbeing and perceived work/life balance?



Illustrative example

Example use case: return to office

Let's say your organization is focused on a return-to-office initiative to deliver on key business priorities (e.g., growth, efficiency, transformation). The listening ecosystem shown below is a strategic approach to support this initiative. This ecosystem provides information not only on how employees are feeling about the return-to-office initiative *(source: strategic topic survey, topic: hybrid work)*, but also how the initiative may be impacting their work schedule *(source: day-to-day work habits, topic: working hours)* and ability to connect with their colleagues *(source: collaboration and organizational networks, topic: collaboration hours)*. Managers can also leverage just-in-time pulse surveys to gauge whether they are offering enough support during the transition *(source: pulse surveys, topic: manager support)*.



Illustrative example

Guiding principles for building a holistic listening strategy

There are a handful of guiding principles to help ensure success when implementing a listening strategy.

Be intentional

Audit existing sources of listening
You are likely already leveraging at least one source of listening within your organization. Don't overlook what already exists when beginning to use new sources and make sure your data funnels into one single platform (e.g., an HRIS system) to support future analytics.

Build intelligent systems
When crafting your listening strategy, make sure you document the data sources, data usage, cadence of data collection, cadence of data analysis, and results visibility. This ensures that you have a home base for all things listening to reference long-term.

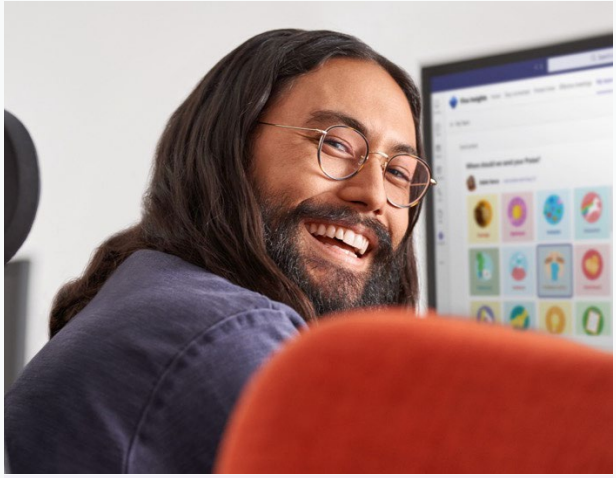
Connect each source to an organizational goal
It is important to provide clear rationale for adding a source of listening to your strategy. For each source, it should be apparent to leadership, as well as the contributing employees, what the source is meant to address. Tying each source to an organizational goal provides purpose and clarity to the strategy.

Be a teacher
Provide education and training for all sources of the listening strategy so employees feel engaged and empowered to leverage the listening outcomes themselves.

Lead with transparency

Build trust
Transparency is key to gaining employee buy-in and trust. In a survey of US LinkedIn users, 79% of respondents said that if their organization was to collect system data on them, they would want their organization to tell them what data they are collecting and why[3]. This is not unique to data from systems– for any of your listening channels, you should communicate the what and the why. Tip: use your Listening Ecosystem Audit Sheet as a starting place.

[3] Viva People Science x LinkedIn Market Research Survey, April 2023



When creating privacy policies, abide by established standards, such as aggregating the data to avoid identification, protecting data storage sites, and having a consistent evaluation cadence to maintain confidentiality.

Employees should be able to view documentation on:

1) data privacy
2) data usage
3) data storage and accessibility,
4) accountability of the data.

Each geographic region might different privacy and security considerations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation in the EU.

Learn more about Microsoft Viva's Employee Privacy and Data Protection.

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Be sincere

Two predictors of strong organizational listening are trust and desire among senior leadership to sincerely listen to employees[5]. Your people will be able to tell if you are authentically interested in their opinion.

Ensure choice

When asking employees to participate in the listening strategy, make sure they have the choice to opt-in to secure feelings of agency over their involvement. It is also important that any reminders used in the listening strategy do not single employees out who have chosen not to participate to avoid feeling pressured.

Don't ask and not act

Employees may be more likely to participate if they perceive action being taken on their survey results. It should not be the intention of the listening strategy to just create sources of employee data for the sake of having data. Taking action at every level of the organization is instrumental to ensuring your listening strategy is effective.

[5] Neill & Bowen, 2021: Ethnical listening to employees during a pandemic: new approaches, barriers, and lessons

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To learn more about employee listening and engagement, please check out:
Workplace Analytics and Employee Feedback (microsoft.com)

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