

ARE YOU REALLY LISTENING?

Why It's Time for HR Leaders
to Rethink People Analytics

CONTENTS

	INTRO	4
1	THE LISTENING LANDSCAPE	5
2	GOING BEYOND THE SURVEY	7
3	NAVIGATING ETHICS, RISKS AND COSTS	10

ABOUT



A world leading provider of market intelligence on the Future of Work and HR Technology. **UNLEASH** is a customer-first, global digital media and events business, delivering the latest news, analysis and market trends for HR, technology, learning and recruitment leaders.

UNLEASH has championed HR excellence and disruption since 2011, serving as the strategic transformation engine for Human Resources. We are built to inspire, connect, and empower HR leaders worldwide to navigate the fast-changing world of work.

Our community is a diverse group of leaders, including HR Buyers from over 120 countries, who reimagine work and help optimize, enable and unleash new ideas and thinking that improve the lives of millions of people each year.

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Welliba—winner of the 2024 HR Unleash Global Startup Award—is redefining people, culture, and organizational insights. Their EXcelerate solution uses the latest AI technologies combined with behavioral science to instantly analyze all available public data and deliver deep insights into people and organizations—without the need for surveys.

EXcelerate converts raw data into strategic recommendations and benchmarks, enabling organizations to make informed decisions that enhance employer branding, boost engagement, address retention challenges, and foster employee development.

Discover how you can elevate your talent strategy, transform your workforce, and stay ahead of your competitors. Learn more at www.welliba.ai

INTRO

In just a few years, people analytics has evolved from a niche support function into a strategic powerhouse that is unlocking ever greater insight into employee experience.

Rapid digitization is behind the explosion of data now available to HR and business leaders. Modern workplaces run on a backbone of digital tools and AI-fueled capabilities, generating continuous insights into employee behavior, engagement and performance.

HR's role has changed dramatically as a result. It's no longer about merely tracking employee sentiment but also measuring, predicting and driving core business outcomes. Senior management are paying close attention, causing people analytics to surge up the business agenda across most industries – with 70% of company executives now citing it as a top priority¹.

But while traditional surveys and dashboards hold the promise of data-driven decision-making, too many organizations end up with shallow metrics, generic responses and little in the way of tangible change. The problem isn't just what employers are asking their staff, but also how they listen and act on the information.

Employees want to see their input lead to meaningful change and improvements in their day-to-day experience at work. It's down to HR to bridge that gap and make sure senior leadership teams understand how optimal workplace cultures are cultivated – and how investment links back to KPIs.

This guide will walk you through today's most prominent people analytics trends and challenges, and explore practical examples of companies taking their people data gathering to the next level.



1. Source: [How to be great at people analytic](#), McKinsey

THE LISTENING LANDSCAPE

For decades, HR has relied on survey data to gauge workplace experience and employee sentiment – usually with mixed results.

First came the era of annual engagement surveys, which provided static snapshots and limited benchmarking opportunities. Next were pulse and eNPS surveys conducted on a more regular basis to address limitations. More recently, the focus has shifted toward intelligent dashboarding and reporting, with the aim of transforming raw data into quick, readily accessible insights.

Despite the progression, key issues remain unsolved. Many HR teams are still struggling to move beyond basic measurement to connect feedback with actual workflow barriers and meaningful action. Ultimately, raw data is useless if it has no clear link back to strategies around employee experience, EVP, engagement, culture and behavioral health.

Meanwhile, the world around us feels increasingly polarized. Clashing perspectives and competing viewpoints have found their way into the workplace, making it harder than ever for HR to navigate opinions and foster an inclusive culture in which every voice truly matters.



Only **14%** of employees feel that their leaders seek their feedback before significant changes, and just **16%** say their input is valued afterward².



2. Source: [The Listening Crisis: When Leaders Ignore Feedback Before And After Change](#), Forbes

Where do traditional surveys fall short?

- **Superficial metrics and poor benchmarking** – Engagement surveys tend to focus on superficial ‘vanity’ metrics and quantitative results, rather than the real blockers and enablers of employee experience. eNPS scores are a prime example, whereby businesses set out to improve their score by x% without and contextual understanding of relevant best-in-class industry norms. Even where benchmarking is an option, most survey providers rely solely on their own client data for comparison, which prevents employers from comparing their performance with close competitors and industry leaders.
- **Time involved** – Company-wide surveys take a lot of time and effort to undertake, especially for mid-to-large organizations with a significant headcount. Frequent pulse checks risk bias and survey fatigue among staff and can often miss the real story of what’s happening on the ground. Business leaders rely on instant data insights to inform strategic decisions, though they are usually left waiting weeks or months before they can access results.
- **Narrow focus and leading questions** – Typical survey questions lack depth and context, often leading employees to conform with a narrative instead of sharing honest views. Asking employees ‘Do you feel valued by your manager?’ offers no room for nuance or detail. This type of phrasing also provokes fear of repercussions if a manager were to find out which employees gave negative responses.
- **HR headaches** – Many HR teams are grappling with data overload and difficulties in converting raw data into actionable insights. Instead of driving meaningful change, they’re often stuck in a cycle of analysis paralysis, collecting more data than they can interpret and struggling to prove the ROI of new listening initiatives.
- **Lack of subsequent action** – It’s easy for employees to get frustrated at the lack of action from surveys, especially when questions are positioned in such a way that implies action will follow. In reality, employee voices may be heard but HR are unable to react due to other priorities, budget constraints or lack of time. Either way, failure to act on survey results leads employees to feel their opinions aren’t valued by the company.



GOING BEYOND THE SURVEY

The issues associated with traditional surveys are ushering in a new era of employee feedback – and HR has a huge opportunity to gain more sway in their business by delivering advanced data insights that fuel performance.

Analytics strategies are evolving fast, especially among industry leaders. New approaches and AI technologies are making it easier to process vast datasets, structure data management models, detect trends and uncover actionable insights in record time.

Engagement surveys still have their place, though they are lagging indicators built to understand the past. By contrast, today's technology makes it possible for businesses to predict drivers of productivity and positive outcomes around employee experience, onboarding, talent development and retention, both now and in future.

The ultimate goal is to build a culture of continuous learning and instant feedback - one that's both scalable and less intrusive. For that, workplace cultures must evolve, alongside careful planning and investment in the right tools and areas of expertise.



Traditional engagement surveys alone are no longer enough to capture the full picture of today's employee experience, and modern workplaces are too dynamic for static, once-a-year feedback cycles.

Most employee listening programs fail to deliver meaningful business results because their findings reflect a snapshot of the past within a purely internal context. What's missing is a clear vision of what "good" looks like, along with practical actions that can be taken to gain a competitive advantage against specific organizations or best-in-class industry standards. We need a new approach, one that leverages AI technology and data to optimize both people and business investments.



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Entering the age of Agentic AI

Agentic AI is transforming the way HR teams decipher the complexities of employee sentiment. The technology analyses public data such as employee review platforms, social commentary and news stories to uncover unfiltered insights and capture instant data points.

People often speak more candidly outside their organization, so this public data becomes a goldmine of insight when processed with context and AI-driven analysis. It's a new way to understand what employees think without the need to ask them to share additional data, while also getting a better understanding of employee opinions and workforce sentiment in other companies.

The beauty of Agentic AI isn't just its speed or efficiency; it's the depth of insight it delivers, which goes far beyond surface-level metrics. Companies can now integrate behavioral science models into their analysis with ease, such as those defining employee experience (EX) as the interplay between an individual's characteristics and their environment.



This helps HR pinpoint where action is needed across personal factors like resilience, social connectedness or purpose, as well as organizational factors such as culture, leadership and physical work environment.

It also reduces the long-standing dependence on repetitive pulse surveys. Research shows that insights gained via Agentic AI tools and third-party data are just as valid and reliable as self-report formats and other forms of employee listening³. That doesn't mean AI will replace traditional surveys; instead, it bolsters existing systems with another dimension of insight – and does so instantly and at a fraction of the cost involved.

Of course, gaining frictionless access to masses of raw data is just one part of the puzzle. Data only becomes truly meaningful when combined with thorough contextual knowledge of an organization, what it is trying to achieve and how it compares with competitors in the same industry.

³ Source: [Seeing Without Asking: A Multi-Method Construct Validation](#), Berger & Justenhoven

Medtronic – Harnessing the power of Agentic AI

Medtronic

CASE STUDY

Medtronic is a global leader in medical technology that employs over 95,000 employees across 150 countries. It specializes across a wide range of healthcare technology solutions, including cardiovascular, diabetes, medical surgery and neuroscience.

Despite its comprehensive employee listening program, the company recognized that traditional engagement surveys alone weren't enough to track, manage and provide a deep understanding of employee experience.

Working closely with the Welliba team, Medtronic decided to integrate the EXcelerate platform to gather insights from a wide range of external data sources and benchmark the results against competitors, without the need for any complex system integrations.

As a result, Medtronic was able to gain detailed comparisons with chosen competitors in the medical tech industry, along with sector averages and 'best in class' scores which allow HR and other business leaders to set a new focus for employee programs.

Want to find out more about how they did it? Make sure to read our full case study with Medtronic below.



[Read full case study](#)



NAVIGATING ETHICS, RISKS AND COSTS

New technologies unlock new opportunities, but they also come with fresh challenges for those tasked with rolling out systems.

AI tools can only succeed if organizations establish a culture of transparency, particularly around ethical data use. HR has a responsibility to uphold a duty of care by demonstrating their commitment to leveraging employee data exclusively for meaningful change.

The potential for AI to transform employee listening by scaling feedback collection and identifying patterns is huge, but HR must still own the interpretation, process clarity and human connection. Accountability mechanisms must evolve too, along with governance frameworks that trace AI decision paths and workflows to limit the risk of bias and skewed results.

Striking this balance is the only way to ensure that AI augments trust and engagement in the workplace in positive ways, rather than undermining it.



Is AI being used appropriately in your business?

One of the biggest risks HR needs to manage is the assumption that Agentic AI tools are equally capable across all tasks.

Research from Harvard Business School shows that while organizations can expect a 40% increase in worker productivity when tasks align with AI's strengths, they should also expect a 19% decrease when tools are used for tasks outside of their immediate capability frontier⁴.

HR can apply new AI technology to strengthen the employee listening approach. In other areas HR needs to be careful to apply and not overly rely on AI where human judgment is crucial.

So, while AI can process large volumes of open-ended feedback to spot key trends in morale, burnout or engagement with high accuracy, it shouldn't replace human-led discussions and feedback around things related to performance or health.

The key is to lay out a clear roadmap for AI deployment before investment, so that new tools serve a clear purpose and their usage doesn't creep beyond defined boundaries.

4. Source: [Navigating the Jagged Technological Frontier](#), HBR

Data privacy and cost control

With traditional surveys, rigorous data privacy measures are needed to safeguard employee trust and consent in line with GDPR. Employees need to know what data is being collected and how AI processes it, as well as who has access to it.

AI listening tools don't involve the same complications. They aggregate and analyze data anonymously, feeding on information from third-party data sources that are already publicly available online. This saves employers major headaches in terms of data privacy and ensuring compliance with ever-evolving regulations.

Employer review sites such as Glassdoor, media articles and analytical reports are ripe with insights and discussions around employee experience and workplace culture. Digging into this data is a great way for HR teams to stay on the pulse of best practice and enable competitive benchmarking across a complex talent landscape – all free from privacy concerns.



Cost control is another key consideration. Using AI to review data from tens of thousands of websites for insight means that companies no longer need to rely on huge teams of analysts to do the legwork. In the past, this capability was the preserve of the world's largest organizations; now it can be delivered within any company at a fraction of the cost compared with conventional listening methods – which we've seen lead to a 95% saving in several cases.

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