

Want Change to *Stick*?



Start by Measuring Employee Sentiment, Not Just Satisfaction

Written by Kara Boyce, Managing Director & Head of Transformation, IGC Group Inc.

Ever rolled out a brilliant change plan... only to feel like your team is smiling politely while quietly plotting your professional demise? Okay...that may be a bit dramatic but I think it painted the visual. You get a resounding yes and alignment from your team in the meeting, but after the meeting, the division couldn't be more blatant. Well, you're not alone.

Change leadership is tough. And it gets tougher when we rely on the wrong signals to guide us. Too many leaders cling to satisfaction surveys like a lifeline when in actual fact, satisfaction is not the same as sentiment. And in times of change, knowing the difference could mean the difference between transformation and total resistance. Let's unpack this, together.

Reflection: Are You Measuring How Employees Feel or Just Whether They're Fed?

What Is Employee Satisfaction and What Does It Actually Measure?

Satisfaction is like that polite "I'm fine" you give the waiter when the meal is okay, but not memorable. It's surface-level. It's based on tangible things like pay, benefits, workload, policies, and sometimes whether the coffee machine works on Mondays.

Satisfaction metrics usually answer questions like:

- Do you have the resources you need?
- Are you happy with your current role?
- Do you like the perks?



Satisfaction is based on tangible things like benefits & workload. It's transactional.

(Source: Gallup)

Useful? Sure. But when you're leading change, satisfaction can mask discomfort. It's possible for employees to be satisfied but silently checked out...nodding in meetings, while mentally building their escape route. Hey, I'm just being honest here!

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As an HR professional with over a decade of experience with employees trusting and confiding in me about how they truly feel about the environment, there is greater insight that can be applied to any change initiative to reduce resistance and increase buy-in. As [Gallup](#) points out, satisfaction is transactional, not transformational. It doesn't tell you how employees feel about change, leadership, or the future.

Reflection: When Was the Last Time You Asked What People Are Really Feeling?

Understanding Employee Sentiment: The Emotional Pulse of Your Workforce

Sentiment is the tone beneath the words. It's the emotional undercurrent, the trust, fear, hope, confusion, or confidence people feel during change. It answers the questions your surveys forget to ask:

- Do I trust this change?
- Do I feel seen and heard?
- Am I safe to say what I really think?

Unlike satisfaction, sentiment is dynamic and real-time. It can shift weekly, or daily, especially during major transformation efforts. That's why we encourage leaders to use tools like pulse surveys and adopt the use of AI to assist with sentiment analysis.

In fact, we show you how to do this in our recent [AI Change prompt video](#). In it, we break down a real-time prompt you can use to extract sentiment trends from your pulse surveys so you're not just measuring responses, but reading the emotional room.

Reflection: Is Your Culture Giving You False Positives?

Why Sentiment Matters More Than Satisfaction During Organizational Change

[McKinsey](#) makes it clear, emotions drive behavior. People don't just follow logic during change, they follow feelings. If sentiment is trending toward fear, frustration, or distrust, even your best-laid plans will crumble. **You might hear things like:**

- "We've seen this before, it won't last."
- "Leadership says they care, but we never see the follow-through."
- "No one asked for our input."

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These are sentiment signals and if you're only tracking satisfaction, you'll miss them entirely.

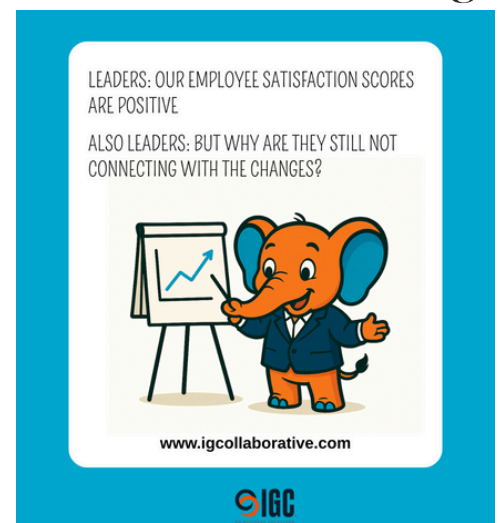
Reflection: What Happens If You Rely on the Wrong Data?

The Risks of Relying Solely on Satisfaction Scores During Change

Let's be honest, high satisfaction scores can lull leaders into a false sense of cultural security. Harvard Business Review warns against this. Metrics, when not paired with narrative, can distort your view of what's really happening.

Here's what can go wrong:

- Culture problems stay hidden until they explode.
- Turnover spikes despite "positive" survey results.
- Employees smile in town halls but disengage in silence.



It's like checking the weather app, seeing sun, and walking into a storm without an umbrella. Your metrics lied to you, or rather, you didn't ask them to tell the whole truth. So, how do we shift this practice and start to focus on what truly matters in change? Keep reading!

Reflection: How Do You Tune In to What People Aren't Saying Out Loud?

How to Measure Sentiment: Tools, Signals, and Strategic Listening

You don't need to be a mind reader, just a better listener. **Here are a few ways to start:**

- Pulse Surveys with Open-Ended Questions: Go beyond multiple choice.
- AI Sentiment Analysis Tools: Platforms like CultureAmp, Glint, or our own AI change prompt demo can help.
- Leadership Listening Forums: Yes, it may be old school but as we say in the Caribbean, old brooms still work...(I think that's the saying, I am terrible with these things.)
- Slack/Email/Text Tone Audits: We all have access to many communication and team integration platforms but are we auditing them? Words matter. Tone matters more.

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Remember, your goal is not just to collect data, it's to create safe spaces for emotional truth to rise to the surface.

As we wrap up, there are two final points that I want to leave with you. These speak directly to your productivity, effectiveness and growth as a change leader. ***One, can you use both satisfaction and sentiment without drowning in data? And two, are you willing and open to hearing the truth?***

Bridging the Gap: Using Both Sentiment and Satisfaction to Drive Change Success

Absolutely! Use both. In fact, when used together, sentiment and satisfaction provide a full picture. Think of satisfaction as your dashboard, and sentiment as your windshield, it helps you see what's coming, not just what's behind.

Use satisfaction metrics to monitor basic needs. Use sentiment to guide messaging, pacing, and support. And most importantly, use both to lead with wisdom, compassion, and data-backed empathy.

Culture Change Starts with Emotional Truth

In change leadership, it is important to be present. This does not mean sitting at your desk daily analysing charts but also taking a closer look at your people. If you want change to stick, get curious about the emotional reality underneath your team's performance. Let sentiment be your compass.

And remember, you don't have to carry the weight of change alone, we at IGC Group Inc. are right here to help you carry it. We'd love to have a virtual coffee chat with you. Feel free to [schedule with us](#) at a convenient time.

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