

GUIDE TO USING INDIVIDUAL VOICE CHANNELS

Practical advice for
HR professionals



The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.



- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

Guide

Guide to using individual voice channels: Practical advice for HR professionals

Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Surveys	2
3	Line managers	3
4	Voice champions	3
5	Senior management	4
6	All employees	4

Acknowledgements

This guide was written by Rory Campbell (Director and Executive Coach, New Vantage Consulting), Chris Saunders (Engagement Adviser), Kimalee Hallam (Global Communications and Engagement Specialist), Louise Tommasi FCIPD (Chief People Officer, Ideagen Plc) and Susannah Cherry (Employee Engagement Manager, Siemens). The guide was reviewed by Professor Helen Shipton FCIPD (Academic, Founder and Co-director, Centre of People, Work and Organisational Practice, Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University).



1 Introduction

This guide provides advice on how HR professionals can maximise the impact of individual voice channels within their organisation.

Individual voice channels include those that enable each employee's voice to be listened to, rather than incorporated into a group perspective. This form of voice recognises that sometimes individuals have legitimate concerns or issues they wish to talk about that may or may not be directly related to improving the functioning of the organisation. Some channels that help organisations to better understand and elicit individual voice are highlighted below.

2 Surveys

Employee surveys can be a quick and low-cost way of eliciting and sharing voice. Organisational surveys improve leader understanding of the key areas that drive performance in an organisation. These insights can often be the basis by which change is driven forward by employees. Surveys can be made more effective by:

- **Having clear objectives and actionable questions**

Understand the goal of the survey. The information derived from an engagement, culture or satisfaction survey can shape your organisation's HR or communication strategy, so take the time to carefully define the objectives of the survey beforehand:

- Allow time to decide the result you want to achieve.
- Involve a selection of stakeholders to support in clarifying and agreeing on those objectives before issuing.
- Consult with a focus group or query the selection of employees that will be completing the survey and ensure you nail down the key issues.

- **Attention to detail when compiling questions**

- Select the right questions. The questions should be easy to understand (consider a pilot test before administering) and might be open-ended, offering space for a range of views, or based on items which employees will rate on a scale (for example 1-5, with 1 representing low experience and 5 where experience is high). In the latter case, in establishing whether individual voice is weak or strong, you might ask employees questions such as: 'To what extent do you feel able to share concerns about work or other factors with your line manager?' or 'To what extent do you feel that you can be authentic in the workplace, that is, talk about things that matter to you?'
- Refrain from asking questions that require respondents to make a difficult or unclear judgement, for example, 'On a scale of 1 to 10, rate our company culture' will elicit deeply subjective responses that defy comparison and oversimplify something that is dynamic and complex.
- Use quantitative questions (which result in data that is easy to convert into objective, numbers-based analysis, for example, yes/no questions) to gain breadth of insight across different parts of the organisation, and qualitative questions to garner feedback on a specific issue. These types of questions often produce rich data on specific issues.

- **Using survey analysis and reporting tools**

Online platforms offer a comprehensive suite of survey tools, accompanied by analysis, to create real-time comparison or trend reports. If survey outcomes are shared with all employees, this promotes local ownership of the knowledge, which can make all the difference. Actively share what you will do with the results – homing in on the areas that are most important and how they will impact the organisation.



1

2

3

4

5

6

- **Involving staff before issuing your survey**
 - Employees are more willing to participate in surveys when they are clear about their purpose and the benefit of their feedback.
 - Allay any concerns about confidentiality by clearly setting out how responses will remain anonymous, for example, and how post-survey action planning should be discussed.
 - Use your pre-survey focus group positively – these employees can play a pivotal role in generating a high response rate throughout the organisation. For advice on building employee engagement and motivation, see the [CIPD factsheet](#).

3 Line managers

Developing line managers' capabilities can deliver major improvements in engagement, productivity, wellbeing, and culture. Line managers can be particularly effective at encouraging employee voice in the following ways:

- By encouraging individual as well as organisational voice – this means being open to issues that matter for employees, even where there may not be a direct link with performance or productivity.
- By encouraging people to share observations or concerns – this helps to create an atmosphere of safety and trust, making the workplace a more human place to spend time, which also pays dividends in employee performance.
- When managers have confidence to listen to employees constructively – just as there needs to be [psychological safety](#) in order for employees to share their voice, leaders also need to have the confidence to listen to it in a constructive manner.

See the CIPD's line manager support [materials](#) for step-by-step guidance on line manager training.

4 Voice champions

Voice champions are useful because it is almost impossible for senior leaders to be aware of all the issues affecting their workforce. They can engage in dialogue with employees to understand opinions about health and safety, HR and communications, corporate social responsibility, IT, social engagement and so on.

Ideally, champions work best when selected by the workforce, as they are likely to exhibit behaviours that have gained the trust of their peers. However, it should always be a voluntary position. See Engage for Success's [Tips on Establishing Employee Voice](#).

By giving your voice champions this responsibility, they become an example to other employees. Employers should consider the following before appointing them:

- Do they demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours, in line with your company values?
- Consider if they are a passionate advocate for voice.
- Are they already involved in employee consultation forums, employee resource groups, survey action working groups, or are they a member of the HR team?

With designated voice champions, you have the potential to show employees that they matter to the business, so make sure that you:

- **Give your champions the right tools**, especially the support of senior management.



1

2

3

4

5

6

- **Identify how much time the role will take** out of the employee's usual working hours and develop a plan for how this will affect other tasks. Voice champions must be able to dedicate time each week to gauging employee feelings and communicating this to management.
- **Provide key resources**, tools and training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities most effectively.
- **Share business information openly and transparently with your voice champions**, so that they are providing informed voice and are able to engage effectively with leadership.
- **Consider having an executive sponsor** who is accountable for ensuring voice champions are appropriately supported.
- **Voice champions should regularly share employee insights with senior management**, who can then lead the discussion on issues raised. For more on how to enable managers to listen to the voices of all employees, see the CIPD's [In a Nutshell](#) article.

5 Senior management

Management buy-in is key to gaining the support and involvement of employees. If employees see that leaders genuinely value their input, they may be more receptive to expressing their voice.

Line managers, like other employees, are susceptible to the message conveyed by the senior team and are unlikely to encourage voice where they sense a lack of support from those at higher levels of the hierarchy.

Senior management buy-in can be achieved more easily if voice champions work with them to elevate the position of employee voice in business priorities.

6 All employees

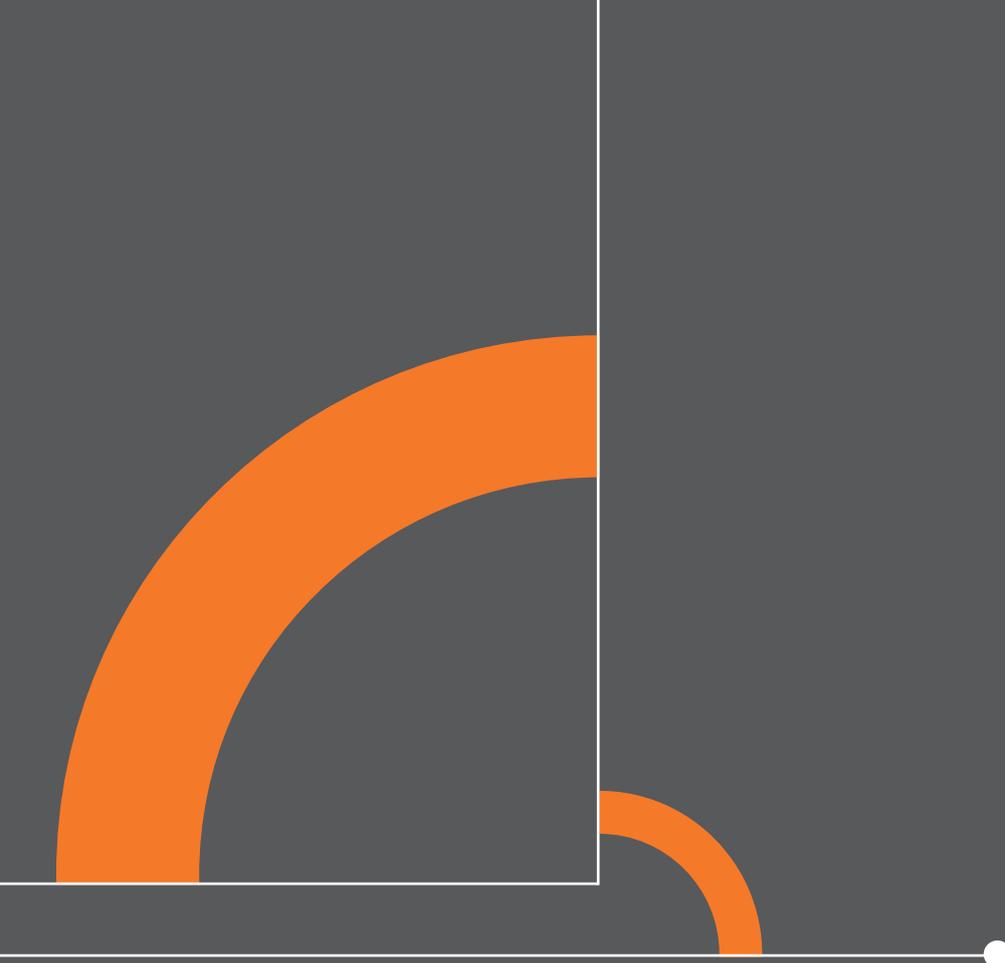
Employees gather valuable information from direct contact with customers, suppliers, and other employees, so make sure you're maximising it. Employers should consider the following:

- **Harness feedback loops and ideation techniques** using printed and digital tools – this creates opportunities for continuous improvement and innovation. Positive feedback loops (when the product of an action leads to an increase in that action) can be used to gather thoughts and input from the team. This ensures that all employees can contribute feedback at each step. This is most easily applied on digital platforms that allow comment-sharing.
- **Brainstorming** – effective feedback allows for a speedy response to implementing new strategic initiatives. Ideation, which is crucial for organisational voice, can be accomplished through brainstorming, which can be virtual. You can create digital suggestion boxes or even have an email address specifically for generating ideas from the workforce. It can also be done through a printed medium, for example in a warehouse setting. If done well, it can help leaders determine the right problems to solve and how to solve them.

Individual voice channels are many and varied, with new techniques and tools arising regularly. As a means of building a positive workplace culture, connecting people to the organisation, and generating powerful insight to improve performance, clear channels are essential.

Establishing goals for individual voice, experimenting with approaches, and ensuring you have sound measures in place will help you to maximise impact for the benefit of employee and employer.

For more resources, see our employee voice [topic page](#).



CIPD

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
151 The Broadway London SW19 1JQ United Kingdom
T +44 (0)20 8612 6200 **F** +44 (0)20 8612 6201
E cipd@cipd.co.uk **W** cipd.co.uk

Incorporated by Royal Charter
Registered as a charity in England and Wales (1079797)
and Scotland (SC045154).

Issued: August 2021 Reference: 8169 © CIPD 2021

