

Harnessing Employee Voice to Shape Unilever's Reward Policies

"Our international assignee community felt that their voices were REALLY heard!"

Peter Newhouse, Senior Vice President and Global Head of Reward at Unilever.

The Objective

Crowdsourcing employee voice to shape reward policies at Unilever.

The Background

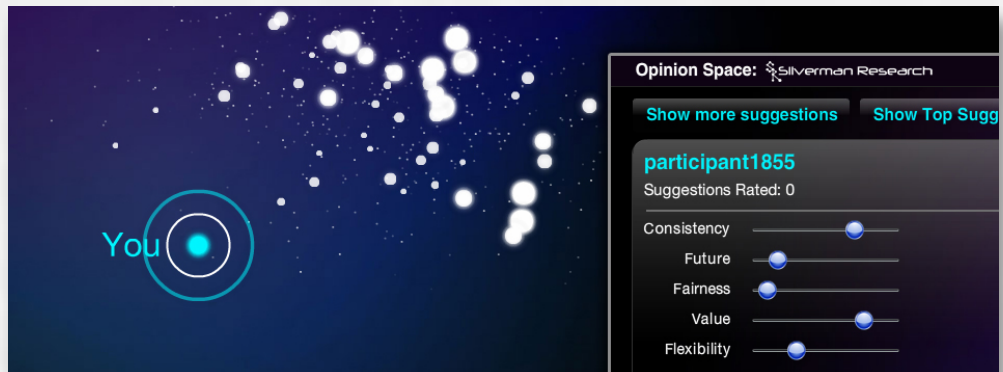
Unilever, a multinational consumer goods company, employs 1,300 international assignees (IAs) — people who have left their home country to work abroad. Unilever's IAs add a wealth of value to the company, bringing expertise and diversity from across the globe. This distributed pool of talent is therefore essential to meeting local demand and maintaining global operations. Given this, it is unsurprising that Unilever's reward policies are highly complex.

In 2007 Unilever changed its IA reward policy, resulting in widespread disapproval due to poor implementation and a lack of consultation. As IAs are placed around the globe, there were difficulties in collecting and aggregating opinions. Previous attempts to get feedback from IAs involved online surveys, however, it was not unusual to find participation rates as low as 20 per cent.

Learning from this experience, Unilever knew they had to make changes to both the policy and the way that they communicated with their people. Unilever sought to obtain the authentic voice of its people in an open and transparent way.

Opinion Space

Opinion Space is a radical alternative to surveys as it allows for multidirectional communication that is further aided by data visualisation technology. This technology enables participants to see how their opinion differs to others and then crowdsource the best suggestions. Opinion Space is unique as it instantly visualises the spread of opinion and allows for peer-selection of the best comments. When combined with text and sentiment analysis, Unilever could quickly harness the wisdom of the crowd and begin shaping changes to the reward policy.



The Results

Initial employee feedback was widely positive. Participation rates grew to over 60%, meaning that 900 IAs voiced their opinions and participated in the discussion. Employees also stated that the interactive nature of Opinion Space was more engaging, and further stated feelings of satisfaction as they were given the opportunity to voice their opinion. Additionally, by visually representing the spread of opinion employees can realise the complexity of IA reward. By raising employee awareness on the complexity of the issue, the employees reported to have a deeper understanding of the issues at hand thereby offsetting further negative emotions.

The results from the text and sentiment analysis revealed key themes in the discussion that would have remained unknown if a traditional survey had been used. Unilever have subsequently taken the findings from the discussion to design radical changes to its reward policies.