A Simple Approach to Action

This guide offers a simple approach to taking action on your survey results. Taking action is often an elusive step in the OPM FEVS cycle, yet is the most critical component. It can seem daunting because organizational issues are complex and it can be difficult to determine what to change or how to change. But it is important to do something. Focusing on just one issue and taking a couple of actions to address it can result in positive gains in other aspects of the organization. Please note that for organizations with bargaining unit employees, supervisors should ensure all labor relations obligations have been met in accordance with law and existing collective bargaining agreements.

A simple approach to action:

- Pick 1 focus area – an issue that needs to be addressed
- Take 2-3 actions to address the issue, including quick wins
- Talk about actions 4 times throughout the year

Action Planning is simply creating a plan that outlines the steps or tasks needed to address the issue. The action plan does not need to be complex to be effective. Create and execute an action plan in 5 steps:

1. **Pick 1 Focus Area**
   With your team, decide on the top issue that needs to be addressed
2. **Identify Actions**
   Consider input from your team and best practices
3. **Create the Action Plan**
   Outline steps, assign due dates, and assign roles and responsibilities
4. **Act on the Plan**
   Assign a project manager who is responsible for ensuring the steps in the plan are followed
5. **Communicate the Actions**
   Talk about actions 4 times throughout the year

1 Pick 1 Focus Area

At this point, you have reviewed your survey results, received input from your team, narrowed down to a couple of topic areas, and brainstormed ideas to improve in those areas.

The next step is to work with your team to **pick one focus area for immediate action**. Consider whether you are able to bring in an outside facilitator to help with this process (see the guide: *Share Results and Solicit Input* for considerations and tips).

You and your team have already gone through a process of prioritizing and narrowing down to a couple of opportunities for improvement. There are a few options for choosing one of these areas for immediate action:

- ❑ Ask your team to vote on their top area.
- ❑ If you used a prioritization rating exercise previously (see the guide: *Share Results and Solicit Input, step 3)*, use the results from that exercise to help make a determination.
- ❑ Complete the prioritization exercise again (see the guide: *Share Results and Solicit Input, step 3).* The team may have gained clarity through further discussion on these topics. It might be beneficial to complete a prioritization exercise for the smaller subset of topics.

Regardless of the approach, you and your team should consider the following when deciding on the focus area for immediate action:

- ❑ **Importance:** Survey results and/or input from your team suggest that this area is problematic, there is an expectation that it needs to be addressed, or it is important to organizational goals, priorities, and the mission.
- ❑ **Impact:** It is a driver of key outcomes and affects employees or groups.
- ❑ **Practical:** It is feasible to address and it will gain support from key stakeholders.

The Case for Picking 1 Focus Area for Immediate Action

Creating meaningful positive change can be difficult. Focusing on one main area can make it easier to take action and increases the likelihood of success.

If you and your team decide that you want to focus on more than one area, a good approach is to stagger the action planning and implementation efforts for each focus area. In other words, focus on one area for immediate action. Create and implement an action plan. Then revisit additional focus areas after you have achieved some successes with your first change initiative. Success with action on the first focus area will build momentum for taking on additional focus areas in the future.

The key is keeping change efforts manageable. Depending on resources, focusing on more than one area could be realistic for your team. However, for most work-unit level organizations taking on more than one change initiative at a time can be overwhelming.

2 Identify Actions

After you have decided on your one focus area, work with your team to identify 2-3 actions to address the opportunity for growth.

Prior to meeting with your team, compile the ideas and recommendations for your focus area generated from previous brainstorming discussions. As a group, review the ideas and recommendations. Look for a combination of 'quick wins' (i.e., easily implemented actions) and actions that require more effort and focus. Consider the following:

- ❑ **Quick Win:** Is it relatively easy to implement?
- ❑ **Big Impact:** Does the action address the issue? Will it address multiple issues at once?
- ❑ **Enthusiasm:** Can we get excited about this? Is this something that we want to do?
- ❑ **Existing Talent:** Can we maximize the existing knowledge, skills and abilities of the team?
- ❑ **Practical:** Do we have the resources (e.g., money, time, people) to implement this action?
- ❑ **Obstacles:** Can we identify and address the obstacles associated with implementing the action?

To take a more structured approach, the group can evaluate each action against the criteria in the table below using a 1-3 scale, where 3 is the highest score and 1 the lowest. Add the ratings for each action. Based on these criteria, decide which action is most likely to facilitate forward progress towards improvement.

Action	Quick Win	Impact	Enthusiasm	Existing Talent	Practical	Obstacles	Total
Action 1:							
Action 2:							

Achieving Quick Wins

Quick wins are actions that easily facilitate change with very little effort or resources. Consider how small and fast successes provide an opportunity to build momentum toward improvement. Some quick wins may already be identified and simply need to be implemented. Or, new ideas may have emerged when you solicited input from your team. Consider the following opportunities for quick wins:

- ➢ What could you do right now to improve the issue?
- ➢ What process improvements have been discussed but not implemented? Are any of these easy to implement?
- ➢ Has someone on your team presented a 'quick win'? Could you give that person the 'green light' to lead the effort?
- ➢ Do you have an employee who gets excited about change and is eager to improve organizational processes? Could you empower that person to take the lead on a particular initiative?

3 Create an Action Plan

An action plan is a structured document to help successfully plan for and track the steps toward organizational change. An action plan is nothing more than a project plan. The action plan will be most useful if you keep it simple and treat it as a 'living document' that is updated with progress or changes.

Major Elements of an Action Plan

Focus Area: Describe the focus area of the action plan.

Issue: Describe the specific issue or challenge that you are planning to address. The issue might describe the specific survey items that informed the need for action.

Action: Write an 'action statement' that describes what you will do to address the issue.

Action Step: Describe the specific steps or tasks required to execute the action.

- ❑ Think sequentially. What steps are needed to get to the desired outcome?
- ❑ Has something like this been done before? If so, what was done? What best practices and lessons learned need be taken into account?

Due Date: Create a timeline with due dates or milestones for each step. Update the action plan if the timeline shifts.

Owner: Assign an owner who is responsible for each action step.

Status: List the status of each action step. The status might be 1) Not Started, 2) Completed, 3) On Track, and 4) Problem.

Sample Action Plan

ACTION PLAN

Focus Area: Recognition

Issue: The majority of employees do not believe that they are recognized for providing high quality products and services and are not satisfied with the recognition that they receive for doing a good job.

Action: Create opportunities for non-monetary employee recognition

Action Steps	Due Date	Owner(s)	Status
Establish a steering committee to research non-monetary recognition options, make recommendations, and develop and implement recognition procedures.	October 15	Supervisor	Completed
Research non-monetary recognition options and best practices (e.g., employee of the month, peer-to-peer recognition, recognition from supervisor during staff meeting, time off awards, etc.).	October 22	Committee	Completed
Gather input from the team on the types of non-monetary recognition they value most.	October 30	Committee	
Present recommendations to the branch supervisor.	November 7	Committee, Supervisor	Completed
Select non-monetary recognition activities to implement, including quick wins.	November 14	Supervisor	Not Started
Develop a standard operating procedure (SOP) for the non-monetary recognition activities, including the nomination process, frequency of recognition activities, and roles and responsibilities.	December 5	Committee	Not Started
Share the draft of the SOP with the team and the branch supervisor for review and comment.	December 5	Committee	Not Started
Provide the committee with feedback on the SOP.	December 12	Supervisor, Team Members	Not Started
Revise and finalize the SOP.	December 19	Committee	Not Started
Implement the non-monetary recognition activities in accordance with the SOP. Assign roles and responsibilities to team members.	January 2	Supervisor	Not Started

Involve your Team in Creating the Action Plan

Continuing to involve your team in creating the action plan will help promote awareness and commitment for the next steps (i.e., implementing the action plan). Involving your team will also help ensure that the action plan addresses employees' key concerns.

There are two components of the action plan that will likely benefit from your team's input:

1. Identifying specific action steps
2. Input on timeline and milestones, particularly for employees who will be involved in implementing the plan (i.e., owners of individual action steps)

Identifying Action Steps

Begin the process of creating the action steps as a group discussion. Consider the following questions to help with the process of generating action steps:

- ❑ What would the first three steps look like to get the action off the ground?
- ❑ Imagine that the action has been fully implemented. What steps were taken to get there?
- ❑ What is the first step? Think very small.

Recognize that generating action steps is not a straightforward or "clean" process. It will likely require you to take the information that team generated and finalize it into a linear set of steps and milestones. Then, send the complied set of action steps out to the group and offer the opportunity for them to review and comment.

Timeline and Milestones

Each action step should have an owner who is responsible for that action step. The action step owner(s) could be an individual or a group of people, and may not necessarily be part of your team. The action step owners should heavily weigh-in on the timeline and milestones. A good approach is to ask the action step owners to develop the timeline and milestones once the action steps have been finalized.

4 Act on the Plan

Execute the action plan by initiating the first action step, and staying committed to the plan. As a manager, your role is to support the change process by staying committed to the change, enabling your team to take action, ensuring accountability, and providing guidance, resources and time.

Make it Iterative	**Shift toward an approach that is flexible and facilitates learning over perfection. If something goes wrong, ask "What did we learn? How can we make improvements?"**
Enable	**Make clear that you trust the action step owner(s) to execute the action. Ensure resources are provided (e.g., people, technology and finances) and empower others to make decisions.**
Accountability	**As a manager, model accountability by "walking the talk" for change, and create the expectation that everyone on your team do the same. Discuss problems as they arise and agree on the path forward with clear responsibilities and steps. Periodically check-in on progress.**
Keep it Going	**Acknowledge and celebrate when action steps are completed, and continue to facilitate action. Ask, "What needs to happen today so that we can get where we want to go? If you are stuck, ask "What can we try next?" Or, "What other ways might there be?"**

Checking-In

As actions are implemented, it is important to be visible and continually support the process. Facilitate engaging check-in discussions with action step owner(s) to review progress, solicit next steps and refocus if necessary.

Here are a few topics that could be discussed:

- ❑ Review progress. How far has the action come? What has prevented or stopped action?
- ❑ Brainstorm ways to ease unexpected obstacles. Ask action owners, "What do you need from me?"
- ❑ Agree upon new action steps that are clear, manageable and timely.

5 Communicate the Actions

It is important to regularly communicate about the actions and to continually seek your team's feedback on whether the actions have achieved the desired outcome. Using the Simple Approach to Action, consider talking about actions four times throughout the year.

Phase 1: Create a State of Awareness

- ❑ After you finalize the action plans, make your team aware of what is going to happen and why.
- ❑ Inform your team of the focus area that will be addressed and connect it to the input they provided.
- ❑ Introduce the actions and action steps.
- ❑ What's in it for them? Gain commitment by setting expectations for employee involvement in supporting the change.

Phase 2: Share Initial Progress

- ❑ After a couple of action steps have been completed, provide a status update.
- ❑ Start with a win. Reiterate how employees have been the driving force to implementing the actions.
- ❑ Express appreciation and the continued expectation of involvement.

Phase 3: Ongoing Updates

- ❑ Continue to report progress, lessons learned and next steps. Communication should continue until the action plan is fully implemented.
- ❑ Express appreciation for how actions will improve the organization.
- ❑ Highlight positive outcomes (e.g., increased cross-functional teamwork)

Key Strategies for Effective Communication

- ❑ Consider the perspective of those who will be hearing your message. How will the message be interpreted?
- ❑ Be transparent with the information you share by telling the truth and being candid about obstacles.
- ❑ Solicit feedback from your team. Has progress on the actions been effective? Have there been any unintended outcomes?
- ❑ Consider multiple formats and opportunities to deliver messages (e.g., staff meetings, emails, one-on-one discussions, etc.). Take into account preferred styles and methods of communication.