

CASE STUDY

Cathay Pacific – aligning people to strategy

Cathay Pacific’s Head of Organisation Development and Change, Graham Barkus, talks about the importance of their global employee survey in driving strategic change and improving performance.

About Cathay Pacific

Cathay Pacific is an award-winning international airline with services to 114 destinations in 35 countries. It employs 20,000 people in Hong Kong and across a global network spanning 46 countries, and is listed on The Stock Exchange of Hong Kong.

Taking change seriously

Graham Barkus is Cathay Pacific’s Head of Organisation Development and Change. Working closely with the executive board, his role is about connecting Cathay Pacific’s strategy with its people through cohesive action.

Graham Barkus says: “Alignment between strategy and staff is fundamental to both successful execution and maintaining necessary strategic agility. If things aren’t working well, there is often misalignment somewhere in the system.” It’s for that reason that Graham Barkus has found Insync Surveys’ Organisation Alignment Survey to be a powerful tool for pinpointing issues. “It’s

difficult to imagine doing this job without the measurement tool,” he says.

Barkus and his team have about 30 internal clients across learning and development, and OD/change management. Most are located in Hong Kong and the rest are at other airports (outports) around the world. The reporting from the staff Organisation Alignment Survey creates a consistent basis for line managers to understand their organisational issues, and enables the development and change team to partner more effectively with management teams for valued outcomes.

Deciding to survey

Insync Surveys’ Organisation Alignment Survey has been used by Cathay Pacific over three years. It’s part of their drive to monitor, track and improve performance.

Graham Barkus says: “The original need to survey came from a desire for greater continuity in our outports. We have country and regional managers who rotate roles and countries every few years as part of

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our management development process. We wanted better handovers between these new and departing people.

“The Organisation Alignment Survey has been well received by people in our outports. It’s given good insight into what was going on. With the first round of findings, a lot of people were quite excited as we could demonstrate employee clarity around what we’re trying to achieve as an organisation.”

Choosing the Organisation Alignment Survey

Graham Barkus says: “We use the Organisation Alignment Survey because of its structure and focus on ‘alignment’, which is more relevant to us than the traditional emphasis on ‘climate’.

“We use the alignment survey to avoid being reactionary. It is an integral tool for our decision making. Action planning is informed by and responds to the survey, rather than reacting to it.”

Identifying key insights

“The primary lessons have mostly been confirmations of suspicions of where issues, and in some cases opportunities, lie. The most visible results so far have been at the level of individual outports or departments. Another outcome has been the value of engaging teams in conversations to discuss what really matters, and the Organisation Alignment Survey results have helped frame the discussions.”

Linking the survey to market pressures

“Our business is all about selling our value proposition and if we’re not aligned to this message internally, we’re much less likely to succeed,” says Graham Barkus.

“An increasing challenge Cathay Pacific faces is getting the right calibre of people in a competitive market. Positively, we are seen by employees as a great customer-facing brand but with some work to do in terms of our employer brand.

“The Organisation Alignment Survey gives insight into the overall health of our organisation and culture. Part of this is to be seen to invest in people, management processes and to drive our strategic direction.

“HR management for our 20,000 people while developing an employer brand is quite a difficult task, especially as we have a legacy of being much smaller. We’ve had to automate many processes but with this you have fewer relationships and become quite transactional.

“For example, in-flight services (cabin crew) are flying most of the time. A remote workforce creates specific management challenges around how we engage staff when we’re not in close contact. The Organisation Alignment Survey has helped us identify opportunities for change in the management support functions that affect cabin crew, which will drive improvement work over the next couple of years.

“More broadly, my team needs to adjust the organisation’s expectations about human capital by almost reinventing it. In doing this, we’re very heavily influenced by the Organisation Alignment Survey findings.”

Change management

Graham Barkus says: “We see the Organisation Alignment Survey as part of our change management mix. Before our managers address change, we want them to think: ‘let me check out my division’s Organisation Alignment Survey results for potential threats or minefields.’

“If I take in-flight services as an example again, it’s a complex division where changes have far-reaching consequences. It’s also increasing in size quickly; within 15 years we’ll have had a 500% increase in staff numbers, with 10,000 people in this area. So before we embark on changes we use the Organisation Alignment Survey to check what our staff are telling us to ensure decisions reflect real risks rather than run head on into sensitive issues.

“Another example in Hong Kong is our engineering department. It’s going through

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a large scale transition in its operating environment. The way we buy aircraft has evolved, we've outsourced many engineering functions and suppliers have ongoing maintenance responsibilities. This means there's less 'traditional' engineering work for our people. Also aircraft are becoming more reliable and we have a better sense of their lifecycle.

"All this translates to quite a significant culture change. Our professional engineers are managing people and suppliers as well as, and sometimes instead of, being hands on with aircraft maintenance work. As we go forward with change processes we're using the Organisation Alignment Survey to identify hot points.

"Another case comes from one of our outport operations. The survey results showed that we had a significant challenge in the people and learning area. Remuneration was also out of sync with the market. As a direct result of the survey findings, we built a successful business case and made a significant amount of organisational change with the help of an external facilitator. In the short term these changes cost us money but over time they will reduce absenteeism and deliver efficiency and productivity gains."

Partnering with Insync Surveys

Graham Barkus says: "One of the things that's really been good about Insync Surveys is their level of support. The Organisation Alignment Survey has become an integral part of Cathay Pacific's decision making and Insync Surveys has become a sounding board for those decisions.

"Service consistency has also been very important. It's a rare combination for a supplier to be able to meet the needs of a large global company but to also ensure we're working with the same core team, right from the beginning. With other suppliers we work with new teams of people every 18 months.

"It's amazing how flexible and willing to accommodate our specific needs Insync



Surveys has been. For our second survey in Hong Kong Insync Surveys custom built a new reporting template and we had their absolute support. The customisations created extra work at their end but they stuck with us, all hands to the pump. The joint partnership is incredible and one that we value very highly."

About Insync Surveys

With offices in Melbourne and Sydney, we specialise in employee, customer, board and other stakeholder surveys backed by consulting. Our surveys supported by our registered psychologists and research experts help organisations become more effective.

We co-founded the Dream Employers Survey and have worked with some of the largest organisations in Asia Pacific, including: Cathay Pacific, Toll, Medibank Private, WorleyParsons, NAB, Fairfax, Nufarm, Visy, GlaxoSmithKline, Orica, Mission Australia, federal and state government departments, many local councils and most university libraries.

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