



New Dynamics

AI at work

AI for employee listening and feedback themes

Use AI to organise feedback while preserving context, privacy and accountable follow-through.

Practical guidance · Worked examples · Printable worksheet

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Read in order for the full approach, or use the linked contents to find a section. The final worksheet gives you space to record decisions and next steps.

Use AI to organise feedback while preserving context, privacy and accountable follow-through. This practical guide to AI employee listening brings together a step-by-step approach, illustrative examples, a reusable worksheet and answers to common questions. Start with the section closest to your current challenge, then use the working session to turn the guidance into a clear next action.

Define a narrow listening task

AI may help organise a large set of employee comments into possible themes. It should not determine what employees feel, diagnose individuals or turn private comments into performance judgements. Start with a question such as: “Which recurring issues should the listening team investigate?”

Explain the use through the organisation’s approved privacy and communication processes. Check whether the original collection purpose and tool arrangements permit the proposed analysis. Existing access to survey comments does not automatically authorise every new use.

Prepare information carefully

Remove unnecessary identifying details and restrict access to the approved team. Recognise that distinctive events, job titles and small groups can still identify people. Decide how sensitive allegations or urgent concerns are routed before running thematic analysis.

Use minimum reporting rules and human review of examples before sharing results. Do not paste raw comments into an unapproved public service. Keep source records controlled so reviewers can check a theme without circulating the entire dataset.

Treat themes as hypotheses

Ask the assistant to group related observations and flag uncertainty or conflicting views. Review samples from each theme and comments it did not classify. Check whether the summary overemphasises frequent wording while missing a serious but less common issue.

Avoid presenting sentiment scores as precise measures of employee wellbeing. Sarcasm, language differences and short comments can change interpretation. A theme is a starting point for a conversation and an action decision, not an objective diagnosis of a team.

Worked example: “communication” as a theme

Illustrative scenario: many comments mention communication. The initial AI summary proposes more leadership updates. A human reviewer checks the source comments and finds two different issues: unclear shift handovers and late changes to project priorities.

The listening team reports the two issues separately and asks the relevant teams to validate the interpretation. Each action has an owner and follow-up. A broad label would have led to a generic response that did not address either problem.

Theme-review worksheet

- **Proposed theme:** What issue appears in the comments?
- **Source check:** Which controlled examples support it?
- **Counterexamples:** Which comments conflict with or complicate the interpretation?
- **Privacy:** Could the wording or group size identify someone?
- **Action owner:** Who can investigate and address the issue?
- **Employee validation:** How will the team check whether it understood correctly?
- **Follow-through:** What change and review date will be communicated?

Do not publish recognisable quotations simply because names were removed. Paraphrase carefully where appropriate and preserve the meaning without exposing the respondent.

Evaluate usefulness after action

Measure whether the analysis improved the team's understanding and action planning, including review time and errors. Compare a sample with manual analysis. If important comments are repeatedly lost or misread, narrow or stop the use.

Keep the [employee engagement guide](#) as the foundation for listening and closing the loop. The [ICO employment information guidance](#) provides a UK reference for worker-information considerations; the final approach needs review for your jurisdiction and context.

Put the guide into practice

Set aside a working session with the people who own this process and one or two people who experience it. Use a fictional or appropriately authorised case, so the discussion can be specific without sharing unnecessary personal information. The purpose is to leave with a usable decision or document, not just agreement that the topic matters.

Prepare the case

Create a fictional set of comments containing several themes, a minority concern and identifying details. Define the permitted analysis and audience. Decide how sensitive allegations are routed separately. Do not begin by asking the model to infer morale or identify the people most likely to be dissatisfied.

Write the starting assumptions down before discussing solutions. If the group disagrees on what happened, identify the information needed to resolve that difference rather than building a plan on an untested story.

Work through the decision

Compare proposed themes with controlled source examples. Ask whether the wording preserves different experiences or collapses them into a broad label. Review unclassified comments and counterexamples. The group should be able to explain why a theme is useful for action, not merely why several comments share similar words.

Ask each participant to explain the proposed decision in their own words. Differences in interpretation often reveal an unclear criterion, a missing responsibility or an instruction that will be difficult to follow.

Test an exception

Introduce a small team and a distinctive story that could reveal the respondent. Decide how the finding can be communicated safely or whether it needs restricted handling. Test sarcasm or ambiguous language as well. A confident sentiment label should not replace a careful reading of the actual comment.

Record what changes in this situation and what remains the same. An exception should lead to a clear next step, with an owner, rather than an informal workaround that nobody can explain later.

Agree the handoff

Give action owners a validated summary with privacy-preserving context and a question to investigate. Confirm how employees will hear what happens next. The handoff should support a practical response to the issue, rather than circulate raw comments or produce a dashboard with no accountable follow-through.

Finish by confirming the owner, the next action and the date when the result will be reviewed. Give the person receiving the work enough context to continue without repeating the whole discussion.

Frequently asked questions

Can AI accurately measure employee sentiment?

Sentiment tools can produce labels or scores, but their meaning and reliability depend on the language, context and task. Short comments, sarcasm and mixed experiences can be misread. Treat outputs as material to review, not precise measures of an individual's feelings. Validate the method and focus on whether it helps understand issues and choose useful actions.

Should managers receive raw survey comments?

That depends on the communicated collection and reporting arrangements, access needs and privacy risks. Raw comments can identify people or contain sensitive concerns. Review what the recipient needs to act and whether a carefully prepared summary is more appropriate. Do not assume that removing names makes unrestricted circulation acceptable, particularly in small teams.

What if an important concern appears only once?

Frequency is not the same as importance. A single comment may raise a serious issue that needs an appropriate confidential route. Define that route before analysis and include human review for relevant concerns. Do not let a theme-ranking system hide lower-volume issues simply because they do not appear often enough to form a prominent cluster.

Review the first cycle

Ask whether the proposed themes led to better questions and actions than the previous method. Check review effort and the types of comments the system missed. Keep employees informed about changes and limitations. If the analysis encourages unsupported conclusions about individuals or teams, revise or stop the use.

Keep a brief record of what was tried, what participants found useful and what needs to change. Compare the result with the original problem rather than judging success only by completion. If the process created extra work without improving clarity, quality or support, simplify it and test again. Share the agreed change with the people who will use it, and name the person responsible for keeping the guidance current.

About New Dynamics

[New Dynamics](#) connects goals, feedback, recognition and reviews around the way organisations work. This guide is published by the New Dynamics Editorial Team as part of our practical library for HR leaders, managers and People teams.

Use the examples and worksheets to structure your own discussions and adapt them to your organisation. Illustrative scenarios are not customer case studies. Policy and employment guidance needs appropriate local review before adoption.

For questions about this guide, corrections or a conversation about your performance management process, email contact@new-dynamics.com. Explore the complete [guide library](#) for related resources.

Your working worksheet

Use the prompts from this guide to prepare one real conversation or decision. Keep personal or sensitive information in your organisation's approved records. This page is for your own working notes.

Proposed theme: What issue appears in the comments?

Source check: Which controlled examples support it?

Counterexamples: Which comments conflict with or complicate the interpretation?

Privacy: Could the wording or group size identify someone?

Action owner: Who can investigate and address the issue?

Employee validation: How will the team check whether it understood correctly?

Follow-through: What change and review date will be communicated?

Discuss your next step with New Dynamics: contact@new-dynamics.com