EVALUATE

Want a DevOps success story? Try employee net promoter score

The more likely an employee is to recommend an employer to a friend, the more likely the company is healthy and successful. Here's how to apply that practice to DevOps.

George Lawton

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The 2016 and 2017 State of DevOps Reports both identified employee net promoter score as a valuable metric correlated with DevOps success stories. It's basically a measure of how many employees would recommend the company to their friends.

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Why eNPS matters

The 2016 State of DevOps Report found higher-performing DevOps organizations had a higher proportion of promoters than low performers.

"High-performing workplaces foster the most employee engagement," the report noted. In fact, employees in high-performing organizations were 2.2 times more likely to recommend their organization to a friend as a great place to work and 1.8 times more likely to recommend their team as a great working environment.

The 2017 State of DevOps Report went on to suggest that transformational leadership was highly correlated with employee net promoter score (eNPS). Transformational leaders excel at balancing being of service to employees, while building alignment around shared enterprise goals, which leads to DevOps success stories.

Measuring eNPS

It is relatively easy for a company to regularly survey employees, but much harder to get actionable feedback for improving culture.

"One strength of eNPS is that it is a simple form of measurement that can be asked in a single question format or in a survey with other culture and engagement questions," said Mila Singh, a culture strategist at CultureIQ, based in New York.

Because it is a short, simple question, asking it a few times a year doesn't cause survey fatigue. Singh's research indicated that engaged employees are 12% more productive than disengaged counterparts -- another key factor when looking for DevOps success stories.

Getting the most from eNPS

We are finding there is a power in and value around human-to-human interactions.

Dominic Price
head of R&D and work futurist, Atlassian

Many cloud services have found ways to improve the utility of eNPS. These include tools and services that analyze why employees respond in a particular way. At the same time, some DevOps leaders -- like Atlassian -- have found that adopting meeting strategies with an emphasis on honest introspection and openness is a better way to promote DevOps culture.

For these companies, eNPS can measure how these strategies work, rather than be a tool to refine DevOps success stories and culture more directly.

Organizations might just have to do an eNPS survey annually. Singh recommended more frequent checks in concert with new wellness and collaboration initiatives. But frequent surveys could become an added burden on employees and management if the score is not changing all that much.

Organizations can also work with third-party services to anonymously poll employees with follow-up questions that ask for suggestions to improve company culture. Companies can also run focus groups to address some of the issues that can stand in the way of a DevOps success story.

Prior to measuring eNPS, though, enterprises will want to build a culture of continuous feedback, where the primary strategy for employee engagement and retention focuses on growth and development.

"Employee engagement doesn't need to be an over-the-top bonding exercises," said Jakub Slamka, chief marketing officer at Nicereply. "The key is asking for feedback consistently and acting on it to create constant improvement. The best tools help management do that in a way that's not time-consuming."

Bringing better feedback to meetings

Atlassian does eNPS surveys to get a sense of their overall employee engagement. Dominic Price, head of R&D and work futurist at Atlassian, found the company can get much more effective feedback, though, if it uses a new style of meeting, called a health check.

Dominic Price

George   asks:

How can companies use eNPS to build a DevOps culture?

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Teams hold health checks monthly or quarterly on an opt-in basis. Health checks are different than traditional retrospectives in that they focus on identifying common values, giving each other honest feedback, and promoting teamwork and sharing DevOps success stories in a way that simply can't happen on a Slack channel.

"We are building this muscle around culture, ways of working and designing Agile processes," Price said. "We are finding there is a power in and value around human-to-human interactions."

This was last published in February 2018

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