



## Case Study: Cancer Research UK

*“Organisations are dynamic systems which need ‘real time’ feedback in order to continue to learn and evolve. Pulse is part of our philosophy for dialogue with our employees.” - Cancer Research UK*

Cancer Research UK is the world's leading independent organisation dedicated to cancer research. It supports research into all aspects of cancer through the work of more than 3,000 scientists, doctors and nurses and is almost entirely funded by donations from the public. The charity has a network of around 650 shops and 1,000 local fundraising groups.

### The challenge

Cancer Research UK has recently developed a new ‘People and Organisational Development Plan’ and felt a strong need to measure the ongoing success of the roll-out of this plan. They last conducted a staff survey 3 years ago but were determined not to repeat what they felt was a mechanistic and desultory experience.

Instead Cancer Research wanted a solution which, whilst providing the hard data they need to validate their actions, also played a role in the success of the strategy itself; supporting and promoting the organisation’s values; and giving a voice to the various constituencies within the organisation. They wanted the ability to see how the mood of the organisation changes over time and they wanted to do so using a tool and a process which lived within the organisation rather than one that was simply imposed upon it.

### The solution

Working closely with Cancer Research UK, Pulse Check designed a solution – the Cancer Research UK Pulse – based around a 6-monthly web and paper based survey but also involving a highly developed communication and engagement strategy.

Crucially, the process was designed to deliver both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ outputs; where hard outputs meant delivering:

- data and qualitative ‘insight’ around the organisation’s key issues
- the ability to conduct multi-dimensional analysis of this data
- the ability to conduct trend analysis where appropriate

And soft outputs included:

- giving a voice to those who work for and *with* the organisation
- encouraging internal dialogue around key issues
- fostering engagement with the organisation’s vision and purpose
- supporting the organisation’s identity and values
- and helping connect the organisation

The starting point was question design.



## Question design

The first Cancer Research Pulse featured 15 core questions - which were asked of everyone who worked for the organisation – and seven sets of directorate-specific questions – which respondents received depending on how they signed in to the Pulse. These questions emerged from a series of workshops with the CR-UK steering group and were tested with a CR-UK user group set up for this purpose.

The 15 core questions were developed within a broad thematic framework provided by the key OD themes identified in the POD business plan. The resulting questions were then sense tested against a variety of generic organisational dimensions in order – primarily – to arrive at Pulses which were balanced in terms of these dimensions.

The 6-monthly nature of the Cancer Research Pulse provided the opportunity to refine questions over time. The first run (in October 2006) was designed to be sufficiently wide in its scope to allow CR-UK to identify broad areas of concern or interest. Subsequent Pulses then focus on particular areas of concern raised in this first Pulse.

In addition to the data coming out of each individual Pulse, this structure provided two opportunities for trend analysis.

1. Indicator questions
2. Thematic trends

Indicator questions – one for each of the key themes identified in the POD business plan - are repeated in each Pulse.

However, as well as indicator questions, the thematic structure from which all questions emerge, allows CR-UK to conduct analysis in terms of thematic trends, regardless of the specific questions.

## Communication and engagement

A key part of the design phase involved developing a communication strategy which supported the Pulses; and a key part of the communication strategy focused on engagement and in particular, on a strategy for feeding back data - and information about actions taken on the basis of that data - to respondents. Here the intranet was vitally important.

The feedback strategy has two key strands: First, getting data onto the intranet as quickly as possible; second, having a mechanism for drawing conclusions from the data swiftly and then communicating those conclusions.

Real-time online reports allowed CR-UK to get data onto the intranet almost instantaneously. However, interpreting that data required the design of a management process from which analysis and actions could emerge. The management process designed involved assembling a senior leadership group, with representatives from the organisation's seven directorates, who meet soon after a Pulse closes to digest and analyse results. Information is then cascaded down through the directorates to employees on the ground.



## Qualitative analysis

Complementing this quantitative work, in April 2007, a qualitative dimension was added to the CR-UK Pulse. This took the form of qualitative analysis of two open-ended questions featured in the Pulse.

The value of analysing the content of open-ended questions is recognised both within and outside the qualitative research field. It allows the researcher to tap into less artificial, more valid sets of themes than closed ended surveys and scales do. At the same time, a systematic analysis of such content allows the researcher to ascertain the spread of ideas across a sample, revealing whether themes are widespread or more idiosyncratic.

The analysis conducted – which included the identification of significant relationships between the quantitative findings and the qualitative – was presented to CR-UK's project management group in the form of a draft report. Discussion and refinement of its findings then followed and a final report was produced through iteration, which was then presented to the senior leadership group.

## Key Results

- The data provides the CR-UK's leadership team with both a regular sense check of how employees feel about the organisation; and, through its free-text responses, with access to specific, deeper employee insights.
- The People and Organisational Development team now has a firm measurement scale in place allowing them to see how well their new strategy is working in the context of its key themes.
- Pulse plays a key role in encouraging internal dialogue around key issues; fostering engagement with the organisation's vision and purpose; and supporting the organisation's identity and values