

The Ins and Outs of Employee Surveys

Employees are critical to the success of your business. Their satisfaction and support are necessary to ensure that your organization is functioning as you would like it to, and satisfied employees can help you to increase productivity, decrease turnover, and improve profits. The Business Research Lab, a leader in employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction surveys, offers the following tips when evaluating your need for and implementation of employee surveys.

How do you know when you need to conduct an employee survey?

Do you have employees? Do you know how they feel about their jobs and their work environments?

If the answer to the first question is yes and the answer to the second question is no, you need to conduct an employee satisfaction survey, even if you have only a few employees and gather the information through informal discussions.

The urgency of the matter is another thing entirely. The need to survey is greater when one or more of the following factors are present:

1. **Rapidly growing organization.** When an organization is growing quickly, employee workflow is often increased. When this happens it is critical to find out how employees feel about their jobs, the organization, and their fit and future within it.
2. **High or growing turnover rate.** While some industries have a naturally high turnover, growing turnover is a problem for any organization. If your absolute level of turnover exceeds the industry average, you have a problem that an employee satisfaction survey is the first step to solving.
3. **Excessive rumors.** A strong rumor mill is symptomatic of other problems in the organization. These can include inadequate communications, mistrust, and fear. Only a survey can uncover the extent to which any of these issues exists.
4. **Planned or recent organizational changes, including change of leadership.** Change can be difficult for many people. If not handled properly, productivity and profits can decline.
5. **Highly competitive industry.** In a highly competitive industry, turnover minimization and productivity and creativity maximization are keys to success. Staying in touch with employees is necessary to facilitate continued competitiveness.
6. **Contemplated changes in pay and benefits.** You must know what needs to be "fixed" and how much "fixing" it needs to maximize return on invested money

and people resources.

Selecting the Methodology for Your Employee Satisfaction Survey

There are two primary methodologies for conducting employee satisfaction surveys - Internet and paper-and-pencil. The choice of methodology should be based on what is best for the respondents - best in terms of convenience, ease of use and trust in the method. There is little difference in price between either method unless the sample size numbers in the thousands, in which case Internet is more cost effective.

If all employees, or substantially all employees have access to the Internet from work, Internet is our recommended methodology. It generally results in a higher response rate and is faster than paper-and-pencil. It also gives a bit more control in terms of how the questions are presented and gives the ability to require that certain questions must be answered.

If only a small percentage of employees have Internet access from work, we recommend using the traditional paper-and-pencil methodology. Even if cost savings could be realized by forcing employees to a central location to complete the survey, it is better to use paper-and-pencil in this circumstance to avoid user errors caused by a lack of familiarity with the Internet medium on the part of some users.

Marketing Your Employee Satisfaction Survey

Your employee satisfaction survey should be treated as seriously as would any of your products or services. It must be of high quality, and it must be marketed correctly.

Creating Awareness

Two to three weeks before the survey invitation goes out, you should begin creating awareness of it.

Step 1.

Communicate to Senior Managers the importance of participation, the confidential nature of the survey, and that it is a priority for the top manager(s) of the company.

Step 2.

Senior managers communicate to the remaining managers in the organization.

Step 3.

Begin disseminating information about the survey to employees via the most effective means available. The method you use should depend upon how you communicate important matters to the entire employee base. Multiple methods should be used if possible. Consider email, memorandums, newsletters and bulletin boards. Draft and disseminate a Q & A sheet to all managers for use in employee meetings. All managers should schedule meetings with the employees immediately reporting to them to discuss the survey process.

Communicating the Benefits of the Employee Satisfaction Survey

In all pre-survey communications, including meetings with employees, the following should be addressed:

- The importance of responding. "We can't fix things if you don't tell us what is broken."
- The confidentiality and anonymity of the process and the data.
- How the results will be disseminated to employees.
- How the information will be used.

Communicate Survey Results and Action Plans to Your Employees

One of the biggest mistakes organizations can make in the survey process is to fail to communicate to everyone the findings of the survey and the plans created to improve weak areas. While we do not suggest distribution of the complete survey report to everyone, we do recommend an open and honest discourse of both organizational strengths and areas for improvement at the department level if possible. Along with the survey findings, let them know what actions have been taken - or will be taken - in response to the survey findings. As there is progress on those actions, provide updates.

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