

To Ask Or Not? Deciding to Survey Employees

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Categories : [Organizational and Personal Leadership](#), [Tools and Practices](#)

Date : February 4, 2015

Have you ever wondered what employees are thinking and feeling about your organization? Whether they are ready to bolt for the next job or planning to stick around until retirement?

Surveys are a great way to figure out employee perspectives on a range of workplace issues. Done right, they can yield valuable information for management decision-making and give employees a voice in your organization. Some issues to consider beforehand:

- **Have a plan to act on survey feedback.** This does NOT mean reacting to every suggestion and complaint. It DOES mean planning to respond to patterns of survey results. Studies that gather dust on the shelf frustrate employees and lower morale;
- **Get senior managers on board.** Sometimes managers are concerned that only squeaky wheels will take the survey and make their department look bad. In most cases, both happy and unhappy employees will take the survey, washing out extreme responses and balancing perspectives;

- **Make responses confidential.** Employees worry about retaliation for being candid in a survey. It's up to you to ensure that retaliation is not a possibility. If you hire a university-based researcher for your survey, they will have to protect employee confidentiality as part of federal human subjects regulations. If hiring a consultant, have them outline their approach to protecting employee confidentiality;
- **Share key survey results.** Let employees know, whether through employee newsletter or email blast, the key organizational strengths and weaknesses revealed by the survey. This sharing shows employees you have heard them and lets them see how their perspectives fit with employees as a whole;
- **Identify what you want to learn.** Employee surveys can serve many purposes, including gauging morale, getting reactions to proposed policy changes, estimating demand for benefits (e.g., onsite daycare or wellness programs), and identifying areas for organizational development;
- **Make sure your employee list is updated and error free.** An accurate employee list yields higher quality survey data by ensuring all employees have the opportunity to participate. By contrast, an employee list outdated or riddled with mistakes makes it harder to generate a representative snapshot of employee perspectives. If you are doing paper (as opposed to Internet) surveys, a good employee list will also save printing and postage.

By thinking through these issues before launching a survey, you can generate solid evidence for management decision-making. And give employees a voice in your organization.