



## **Employee Surveys – A Brief Summary**

### **Definition**

An employee survey is a questionnaire that employees at a given organization complete. It is conducted with a view towards gaining an understanding of their perspectives, productivity and other suggestions, problems and preferences at work.

### **Benefits**

An employee survey can be used to enable managers to get in touch with their employees. This is particularly valuable where there is a definite social divide between managers and employees. In other words, it is useful when an “us” and “them” situation precludes honest discussion or productive consultation between managers and employees.

An employee survey is a communication tool. It gives employees the opportunity to voice their views. Providing employees with the chance to present their input is termed “voice control”. This is valuable as it creates some positive perceptions around justice within the Company. Research shows that employees are more likely to accept and commit to decisions that they disagree with, if allowed voice control.

Employee surveys promote the impression that management is, in fact, open to hearing employee views. Pertinent questions are asked. It therefore acts as a marketing tool for the management team within the organization.

Importantly, the survey is often used as a diagnostic tool, to define issues of concern in the organization and to understand the causes. It provides information, which forms a basis of informed decisions around which interventions or courses of action would be most effective in addressing the perspectives identified in the survey.

### **Getting the most out of an employee survey**

There are generic items and issues that can be covered in a standard employee survey. This approach is not optimal as pivotal issues may be missed and important variables may not be sufficiently measured.

It is preferable to perform an initial analysis in order to develop relevant items and to establish the degree of emphasis to be placed on each factor that is going to be assessed. In short, it is best to know what to ask. This type of initial analysis that precedes the survey is usually gathered through carefully formulated interviews with employees throughout the organization.

The survey form is then divided into key sections for the sake of clarity and so that employees are given the comfort of knowing what the basic questions are trying to achieve. Items that require rating scales are typically used, along with open-ended questions that allow for comment and explanation.

For the survey to be at all effective, one places a reliance on a deep level of employee honesty. This can only be guaranteed if the survey provides a safe environment in which to express views. Honesty can easily be undermined by fears based on job insecurity or repercussions in terms of compensation or career progression.

In order to achieve a safe environment, confidentiality needs to be guaranteed. For this reason it is best that objective outsiders conduct the survey. Employees should ideally have the security of knowing that management will never see the documents and that individual's names will not under any circumstances be mentioned. The majority of items need to be worded in an unthreatening manner. Various statements need to be made at the outset to allay fears. Such statements would include the fact that individual opinions will be collated into Group results. Anonymity is provided and there will be no individual accountability for the responses futuristically.

The results should be professionally collated into meaningful data. The survey can yield opinion poll type information. Trends can be identified. The data is then presented in tables and graphs that explain the quantification of numerical items. Also open-ended questions are collated into a qualitative analysis.

### **What next?**

Once the survey is completed, the results are presented to and discussed with the Human Resources department and the most senior levels of management. They are then reported to the rest of the organization with due respect to management confidentiality and informational discretion.

Plans of action to address problems are suggested. Typically the Company itself can facilitate many solutions. Some may involve outside intervention. Each option is reviewed and considered by management and/or the Human Resources Department and decisions are made.