



DEVELOP

If you really want to know what is happening in your organization, ask the people who know—your employees.

It's an understatement to say that people's opinions and perceptions are more important now than ever before. Since the solutions to most problems within a company are well known to its employees, more organizations are starting to see the benefits of soliciting the opinions and perceptions of their employees, customers and constituents.

Rensis Likert, a pioneer of the survey approach, used surveys to measure attitudes, perceptions and motivation in order to help improve company productivity, quality and service. He found a positive correlation between attitude and corporate profitability, growth and return on investment. Today, we know that many of the factors that affect quality, productivity and service are the same ones that also affect safety. When properly prepared and administered, safety perception surveys help identify how these key factors are functioning.

Successful companies such as Best Buy believe in the value of perception surveys, and they have prospered by acting on the findings. One of the distinguishing characteristics of companies such as these is that they are "measurement happy." They do not fear the outcome of any measurement tool, and in fact look forward to the results as an opportunity to continue to improve.

The key to obtaining maximum returns from a safety perception survey lies in the construction of the survey itself. As previously stated, we believe the benefits of surveys are diminished when they are simply taken off the shelf as a one-size-fits-all survey. All companies are positioned at different levels of the safety excellence scale. Each has a unique profile, dictating specific survey design needs. For example, one company may have a fleet or employ contractors, while another does not. One company may have a flat organization with one location and have little work diversity, while another may be employing many workers in different positions in many locations. Some companies have visible senior management involvement, while others, due to factors such as geography, must find other ways to demonstrate management's health and safety commitment. Some companies have implemented behaviour-based safety and want to ask employees how the program is working. Other companies are a long ways away from implementing such programs and therefore do not want such questions included in their surveys. We recommend that you don't settle for a survey that isn't right for your company. A one-size-fits-all survey seeks to fill all companies' needs or find a common denominator. As a result, the survey often meets only the needs of a few. Flexibility in the development process is very important in order to get the best value from your survey.

A poorly developed survey contains the seeds of its own destruction. After you have administered the survey, you will have to live with what you have developed. To get good value, you need to select the right scale, reporting parameters and statements to suit your organization. In this chapter, we will help you with these important survey variables.

Helpful HINT from the school of hard knocks

After a series of meetings with the safety group of an international manufacturing firm, we were pleased to hear that we were invited to give the final pitch to the senior management team. We gave the pitch while the Vice President of Operations looked over the survey. As he read, you could see he was concerned. Then he flat-out stated in the meeting that he had some concerns with some of the survey statements. Needless to say, that brought a quick end to the perception survey for this company. We were so taken aback that we didn't rebut.

Don't let one or two survey statements prevent you from surveying. If there are statements that you feel your company is not ready to answer, take them out. You will have ample opportunities to include them in future surveys. Do not be inflexible or you may lose the opportunity to conduct the survey.

Determining the reporting parameters

Table 1.

Perception Survey ABC Utilities Ltd.

ease check one box in each area:

| LOCATION | DIVISION | POSITION |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cucamonga | <input type="checkbox"/> Administration | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-supervisory |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Timbuktu | <input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing | <input type="checkbox"/> Supervisory |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tuktoyaktuk | <input type="checkbox"/> Operations | <input type="checkbox"/> Management |

1. In this company, employee health and safety does not take a backseat to productivity or service.

Comments _____

- 0 Not Appl.
- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Agree
- 4 Strongly Agree

2. When it comes to safety, our corporate leaders practice what they preach.

Comments _____

- 0 Not Appl.
- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Agree
- 4 Strongly Agree

Remember: Please provide comments.

The top three boxes in Table 1 are an example of how the reporting parameters on the front page of your survey might look. These parameters determine how the data will be made available to you when it's time to prepare a report. If you don't structure this part of the survey properly, you won't be able to get the database to provide you with the summary data you need. We cannot emphasize enough how absolutely critical this part of the survey process is to a successful survey outcome.

For example, if you need information on the department that the respondents work in and if you don't include a department reporting parameter to collect this information at the beginning of the process, you will not be able to go back and ask the database for the information later. If you don't ask employees their location, you won't know if the response averages apply to your branches in Timbuktu, Cucamonga, Tuktoyaktuk or all of them. It is extremely important that you take the time to assess all the reporting parameters at the onset of your survey.

The reporting parameters will dictate the design of the survey's front page. Here are some of the first major decisions you have to make:

- Which and how many employees are you going to survey? What is the population you are after? Is it field staff? Contractors? Administration? Are management and supervisory staff to be included? How many respondents will be asked to respond to each group?
- Do you need the database to report by location? Do you need it to report results by region or district or position?

If the parameters provide you with too broad of a view of the data, it will be difficult to take a narrower view after all of the data is entered. For example, if you do not allow the respondents to identify their surveys by location, your final report will be able to report only by company or perhaps region. On the other hand, if you provide too narrow a view, the database will average responses from too few respondents, which could jeopardize their anonymity, and compromise the validity of the numerical data. For example, if you have only one welder working in Tuktoyaktuk and your reporting parameters request survey respondents to select a location, the responses for the sole welder in Tuktoyaktuk will be exposed for all to see. In addition, the one welder's response could not be considered representative of welders in the company.

The reporting parameters are a critical part of any survey. Some employees may feel uncomfortable providing the parameter information if they fear being identified. When the survey is introduced to employees it is important to address such fears.

Let's work through a fictitious example. Let's suppose you work for the organization described in Table 2. You have a head office in Tuktoyaktuk, where all of the Manufacturing and Administration staff work. In addition, there are 30 Operations employees in Tuktoyaktuk. There are 70 Operations staff in Cucamonga and 100 in Timbuktu.

Table 2.

