

## Everything you need to know about employee surveys

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Sound employment practices geared toward attracting, training, retaining, and rewarding employees must reflect a clear understanding of the employees who make up the workforce. According to Judd, O'Rourke, and Grant (2018), employee surveys are an excellent vehicle for gaining that insight into employees' opinions and preferences. However, it is important to approach employee surveys with caution because misinterpreting the results or failing to act in response to the feedback can have a devastating effect on employee morale.

### What is an employee survey?

Employee surveys are intended to gain an appreciation of how employees perceive the company and issues related to their workplace. Employers may conduct employee surveys regularly, for example once or twice a year, in search of information on employees' general attitudes across a variety of workforce-related areas. The survey carried out can also be a specific one, whose sole aim would be to uncover the opinions and sentiments of the employees about a specific job circumstance or issue. These surveys can go a long way in improving the performance, satisfaction, and retention rates of a company's workforce.

There are three common categories of employee surveys namely employee opinion surveys and satisfaction surveys, culture surveys, and employee engagement surveys.

Briefly (*as differentiated in the SHRM article "Managing Employee Surveys"*):

1. **"Employee opinion and satisfaction surveys** measure employee views, attitudes and perceptions of their organization (also known as "climate surveys").
2. An **employee culture survey** measures the point of view of employees and is designed to assess whether it aligns with that of the organization or its departments.
3. **Employee engagement surveys** measure employees' commitment, motivation, sense of purpose, and passion for their work and organization."

This article will focus mainly on employee opinion surveys, however, most of the principles apply and can be used in the other two employee surveys.

### Benefits of the periodic administration of employee surveys

- These surveys are great predictors of behavior

So much can be learned through these surveys, to the extent that employees' likelihood to leave could

be predicted simply by whether employees filled out the surveys or not. The research by Judd et al revealed that employees at Facebook who did not complete either of the company's two annual surveys were 2.6 times more likely to leave Facebook within the following six months.

- Surveys give employees the chance to feel heard.

To illustrate how much employees value the opportunity to share their opinions, Judd et al revealed that the majority of employees in American cooperations complete their annual surveys. On average, more than half participate in the annual benefits survey, while more than two-thirds complete the annual diversity survey and an impressive 95% participate in the engagement survey. Furthermore, three in five (61%) Facebook employees submit personal feedback and suggestions which address about five different topics.

- Surveys are a vehicle for changing behaviour.

Psychologists have found that asking questions can change the behaviour of the people being asked for their perspectives and feedback. Consistency is a part of the influence, in that agreeing/saying yes to a question in a survey builds a commitment that most people follow through on. On the flip side, disagreeing/saying no to a question causes them to reflect on their behaviour, which sometimes results in a change. Judd et al advise that as long as the behaviour is desirable, people are likely to persuade themselves to conform to it. Several research studies have supported these assertions.

- A 2004 study by P. Williams, G.J. Fitzsimons, and L.G. Block titled "*When Consumers Do Not Recognize "Benign" Intention Questions as Persuasion Attempts*" showed this phenomenon. The study showed that when people were asked whether they would like to volunteer three hours for the American Cancer Society, volunteering rates rose to 31% from 4%.
- Another study, "*Does Measuring Intent Change Behavior?*" by V.G. Morwitz, E. Johnson, and D. Schmittlein, showed that people who were asked whether they were planning to buy a new computer in the following six months became 18% more likely to do so.
- A study by Adam Grant also supported this assertion and the results are presented in the article, "*Making the Ask: How one simple question can turn skeptics into givers*". Grant and his students set out to increase the attendance at home basketball games by experimenting with season ticket holders. The first group was the control group and was not contacted at all. The second group received a persuasive email with "quotes from coaches and players about how packed stands increase the team's shot percentages", and the final group was asked if they were planning on attending the game. The experiment revealed that 77% of the people from the first group attended the game, while 76% from the second group and 85% from the final group attended the game. The results showed that when asked the question of attending the game attendance increased by 8% from 77% to 85%.
- Judd et al also carried out a similar experiment. They asked 30% of the employees that participated in an employee engagement survey whether or not they were personally committed to improving their experience working at Facebook. What they found was that the group which was asked the question became "12% more likely than their peers to request a curated list of additional resources and tools to help them become more engaged at Facebook — and that was

true whether their original answer was yes or no”.

- Other benefits

Other benefits of employee surveys are:

- Help decision-makers to be in sync with their employees’ priorities, thereby revealing where efforts must be directed.
- The surveys can uncover issues that management was not aware of needed attention.
- Companies can address all gaps in service, training, and professional development
- Employee surveys can assist in facilitating development and organizational change.
- The communication between management and employees becomes more effective, allowing management to make informed decisions knowing the likely effects on employees.
- These surveys are a way to garner the necessary feedback on the impact of company policies and procedures.
- Also, these surveys can help in ascertaining the current perception or sentiment regarding certain managers or management.
- Managers can also discover different ways to motivate, increase job satisfaction, and retain employees. This is likely to improve their performance, as well as, that of the company.
- Employee surveys can be utilized to investigate specific issues, such as the causes of significant employee turnover.

## What to do to get the most out of these surveys

In an article called “How to Get the Most Benefit from Your Employee Opinion Survey”, Miles Burke, founder of 6Q, outlines five (5) things companies can do to get the most benefit from employee surveys. These five (5) things are discussed below.

### Before embarking on an employee survey

- Choose the right questions

It is important to avoid asking leading or loaded questions. Leading questions manipulate participants by leading them to particular responses. Generally, they include opinions on concepts or ideas before the specific questions are asked. Alternatively, the wording of the questions may be biased/leading from the start. Leading questions can cause participants to feel like there's a clear "correct" answer, and they'd be foolish to respond otherwise.

A leading question example could be "***Many people are satisfied with their work environment, are you satisfied too?***". Loaded questions can be equally harmful. Words like '***hate***' or '***love***' for example are usually loaded with emotion. An example would be asking a question like “Do you love your job as much as your colleagues do?”.

- Set the most suitable survey frequency

Setting a suitable survey frequency improves the chances of reviewing, and acting quickly on the results of the survey.

- Decide an anonymous or individual

The choice between anonymous and individual may determine the outcome and effectiveness of the survey. The difference between the two is that anonymous refers to collecting the feedback anonymously without knowing who the feedback came from, while individual refers to collecting feedback that can identify the individual who submitted the feedback. There is a need to ascertain the prevailing culture, and whether employees would be comfortable responding to the survey with the knowledge that their response can be traced back to them.

- Let your team know why you are doing this

Explaining/informing employees why the survey is being done is very important. This can be done at a sensitization meeting or even through the use of a group email to the team telling them in simple terms what the survey is measuring and why it is important to carry out.

- Set the right expectations with your team

It is also important to explain what is expected. Make sure to let employees know that there are no correct or incorrect responses and that all the input will be handled with confidentiality and without consequence. Even so, some individuals may feel they have to respond in a specific way.

## **After receiving the employee survey results**

- Review them without being defensive

If there are responses that are perceived as negative, it is important not to get offended but instead to take a moment to take a deep breath and resist the urge to take any retaliatory actions. Constructively embrace this information and use it as an opportunity to improve.

- Share the survey results with your team

Schedule some time for focus groups, where everybody can say what they need to. It is important that management does not dominate the meeting as the focus groups seek to discuss and evaluate the results openly and how the company can develop or celebrate its achievements.

- Take notice of what your team are saying

When reviewing the results, there's a lot to be learnt by meeting in person. There is a lot that can be deduced from the tone and body language. Be sure to listen fully, and don't discount anyone's opinions, regardless of how misguided they may seem.

- Create and assign a list of actions

Before discussing results with their departments, managers must explain the concept of employee engagement to the team members and how the survey is used to assess commitment. Managers should then promote open discussion of the findings of the study, item by item, and seek feedback from all team members. Finally, managers and their teams should determine the things to work on, determine the steps to take to increase interaction, appoint "owners" to each task, and set deadlines and follow-up dates.

- Run the employee survey again

The best way to observe any improvements/changes in sentiment is to conduct employee surveys regularly.

Employees genuinely feel that if their employers ask for their input and feedback, then they are going to use the feedback and make the relevant changes. It is therefore important to always show appreciation for the input and feedback, and discuss ways in which it can be used. People generally do not appreciate being ignored especially after making an effort to answer questions asked of them. Once results have been received and action plans made, managers should ensure that they follow through on action plans. If the circumstances are such that the actions are not feasible at the current time, then the employer must communicate that to the employees.

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