

Culture Survey Quality Assurance and Interpretation Guidance

INTRODUCTION

A confidential employee perception survey is an important tool to help assess the safety culture or climate in your organization. Since culture cannot be directly measured, a survey about safety culture attributes is a good way to determine employees' views of the company's safety culture.

The most accurate results are obtained by ensuring confidentiality and by surveying all employees. Employees confidentially surveyed will provide honest feedback and are less likely to use the survey as an opportunity to make things seem better or worse than they are.

SURVEY OPTIONS

Companies have three broad options in relation to conducting the survey: 1) Work with a consultant who specializes in culture assessment; 2) Develop a company-specific survey and conduct it without outside help; 3) Use the **CORE**Safety Culture Survey.

Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages
Consultant developed	Accuracy, precision & interpretation	Cost
Custom survey, internally developed	Low cost	Lowest accuracy
CORE Safety survey, internally developed	Low cost	Lowest accuracy

SURVEY QUALITY

To ensure the results of the survey can be viewed with the greatest degree of confidence and to minimize the potential for survey response error or bias, it is important for the survey to be constructed and conducted with the following considerations: 1) the survey should be made up of questions that at least 80 percent or more of those reading the statement or question consistently understands what is being said or asked; 2) the largest percentage of employees possible in the assessed workforce should respond to the survey—at least 80 percent. 3) participants should be assured of the confidentiality of the survey data; and, 4) the survey should not be distributed where responses can be compared among participants (over-night, in closed door sessions, etc.), unless this is the only available data collection method. This can best be accomplished by conducting the survey in groups where responses are not compared between individuals and where completion is most efficient, i.e., all together or in multiple groups, but in front of the person conducting the survey.

The number of questions asked is discretionary, but should include a balance of attributes to ensure an appropriate weighting of responses. The most important attributes and the most complex (most aspects) should have the most questions. Selecting the right statements or questions should produce a brief, objective, sample and specific survey.

The sequencing of statements should stimulate recall, motivate the respondent to reply and allow the survey to flow in an orderly fashion.

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Demographic information should be collected only to the extent it helps in understanding potential differences in experience and position within an organization. Do managers think differently about the issues than workers? However, caution must be exercised to avoid asking questions that are too detailed and might reveal identities of those taking the survey.

The most appropriate response scale to use with statement-based surveys is a scale that includes five possible responses: “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “unsure” (or “neutral”), “agree”, “strongly agree”. If a company elects to use questions versus statements in its survey design, it is appropriate to use “yes” and “no” responses. However, it should be noted that this approach is more limited in enabling companies to measure smaller changes in perceptions over time.

INTERVIEW

One-on-one or small group interviews or focus groups can provide great insight into the prevailing feeling and perceptions of any work group. Interviews are most often and most effectively used as a follow-up to the survey. The survey can reveal issues and notable trends and patterns. Interviews are helpful to characterize and quantify those trends as well other trends that might not be raised in the survey. However, interviews using company interviewers may be less open and honest than those involving a third party who can provide a greater assurance of confidentiality.

INTERPRETING SURVEY DATA

Ideally, enough data will be collected using the same survey questions across all operating units of the company. This will allow those conducting the survey to obtain a complete picture of the safety culture of the organization, as compared to individual mines or facilities. Recognizing that safety culture is leadership driven, the results should help management identify barriers to a positive, proactive safety culture.

Caution should always be exercised when interpreting survey results. Perception surveys reflect perceptions. In matters associated with opinion, perceptions are reality. However, in matters of fact, perceptions are just that, opinion. Survey administrators should understand the difference.

Well-designed and executed confidential perception surveys can yield very important insight into organizational safety culture. However, the importance of this work is not just to have improved insight into the organization, but to use the data to enhance the safety culture. The survey results provide a compass heading, but companies must follow the heading and re-survey over time to gain improvements in culture that provide the foundation for an effective management system.