

## Survey Objectives/Planning Outline

The first step to conducting a survey or doing opinion research is establishing the objectives and developing a plan to attain those objectives. Define the methodology, content, the statistical outputs, how it will be reported and acted upon, and when it is complete, how well will the expected outcome attained.

*The outline below focuses primarily on the process used for employee opinion/attitude surveys. Other survey/opinion research is similar but is generally not as complex. For other surveys, modify the steps as necessary.*

Some issues/questions to consider are:

### Survey Purpose

- What needs to be improved?
- What is the expected outcome?
- Why is the information needed?
- How and who is going to use the information?
- Is the data already available?
- What are the central themes or question categories.
- What are the broad questions to be answered?



### Management Buy-In

- It is essential that senior management buy-in to the survey objectives, process, required support, funding, reporting, communication, etc.
- See [“Getting Management Buy-In”](#).

### Demographics

- What is the population of interest and is information required for particular sub-groups (for example, gender, a particular age group, an ethnic group, departments, length of service, job, etc.)?
- What detailed cross-tabulations will be required?
- Will the survey or opinion research be conducted only once or will it be repeated again in the future? If repeated, what frequency quarterly, annually, bi-annually, etc.?

### 100% or Sampling

- Most employee opinion surveys focus on obtaining 100% participation. This is because department populations are generally too small to consider sampling. Sampling may be appropriate for single

issue surveys where demographic breakdown is unnecessary.

- See [“Sampling/Confidence Levels”](#).

### Environmental Sensitivity

- Is there a threat to respondents?
- What are the concerns about anonymity?
- Are there security considerations?
- Is there a concern that persons may complete the survey or opinion research more than once?
- Is the organization ready for this type of intervention?
- See [“Getting Management Buy-In”](#).

### Development and Support Involvement

Plan how to involve the following:

- Senior executives
- Directors and managers
- Task force and facilitators
- Outside consultants

### Question Development

- After determining the central theme/issues, writing great questions is the most challenging and essential task. Questions need to be evaluated and double checked to assure they accurately report what is needed to attain the objective/purpose of the survey.
- See [“Writing Great Questions”](#).

### Response Scales

- Selecting the right response scale(s) that permit the respondent to select a response that appropriately reflects their view while portraying adequate detail to clearly display the range of opinions to the person receiving the report is a vital element of survey development.
- See [“Response Scales”](#).

### Demographics

- The ability to differentiate and drill down into data is greatly dependent on how well demographics are defined and presented.
- See [“Demographics”](#).

### Data Collection Strategies

- Today, choosing the correct data collection strategy depends first upon whether online computer access is available to respondents. Going directly to a website with a link, or responding to an email invitation, or sending an email with the survey being the email are all options. Online survey completion is the preferred process. If online access is not available, paper, IVR, telephone or personal contact are options.
- There are three options to collecting data online. One, there are companies that provide simple data collection and reporting options at a modest price to conduct the first survey, but using it for repeated surveys is more costly and difficult. Two, you can contract with a full-service major provider and they will do both the data collection and reporting. This is generally outside the

financial expectations of most organizations. Third, there are organizations like OHD that have the expertise and low overhead. We provide high quality, timely, accurate, unbundled pricing and personal service at reasonable cost.

- See [“Data Collection Methodology”](#).

### Improving Participation

- When 100% participation is the objective, define ways to get there. Provide appropriate promotion, set targets, and incentives. If sampling is used, it is just as essential that you fulfill participation goals or your confidence level will not be attained. Accepting low participation levels is not an option, therefore, participation level deserves a significant priority in the survey process.
- See [“Improving Response Rate”](#).

### Data Analysis

- All too often we are called into the survey process after organizations have the data and can't process it effectively. This is difficult to realize when we have software like Excel, Access, SPSS, and other statistical programs. These programs work well when you are doing pure statistical analysis one time, a research paper for a thesis. These software programs are not easily manipulated to produce a host of reports for different parts of the organization, job families, etc. Specialized survey software, expensive and not generally available, is a much better option. And, in most cases, it is better to use an outside expert who already invested in the costly software and has learned how to use it efficiently.

### Reporting Results

- For employee opinion surveys, one needs to identify the lowest level that reports will be prepared and we strongly suggest they be prepared for first line supervisors if there are 4 or more respondents. For supervisors with fewer than 4 direct reports, figure out how to rollup two small departments into one report or roll their respondents into the next level report. The reason we stress this level is that they should be responsible for action planning. If they are not, the next level will be responsible. Additionally, we often find that some of the small departments have problems. Without going to reporting at this level, you will not be able to drill down to determine the source of organization problems. After you have determined the lowest level reports, it is easy to identify the next level reports all the way up to senior management.
- See [“Reporting Results”](#).

### Feedback Strategy

- If management doesn't provide data down to the lowest supervisory level, they then become responsible for making all the required changes and they are unable to do so. We find typically, about half the problems need to be worked on from the top down and half from the bottom up. Therefore, working the problem from the

top down will yield an overall outcome less than desired. Based on this premise, one needs to think about the effectiveness of supervision in feeding the data back to their direct reports. While most will do a somewhat acceptable job, the potential for major problems caused by wrong interpretation of data, defensiveness, placing the blame elsewhere, not being able to separate their area of responsibility from that of upper level management, trying to deal with issues they cannot deal with, etc.

- See [“Feedback Strategy”](#).



### Action Planning

- Once the work group has discussed the feedback report they need to develop two lists. One list for things they can work on and the other the list to communicate to higher level management. Both lists should be prioritized using a technique such as multi-voting. Then they can begin discussing what actions they can take to eliminate or reduce the problem areas.
- See [“Action Planning”](#).

### Monitoring Progress/ Communicating Success

- If the process has been executed well up to this point people are feeling great about the opportunity to provide feedback and participate in planning for improvement. People now will want to be kept informed about what is happening on their action items and that can be accomplished by the supervisor. The challenge is how to communicate what is happening on organization-wide actions. Senior management needs to make sure that they talk about the actions, it is communicated in the internal newsletter and they also find other ways to keep the top down action plans on schedule and the results being reported. One new approach is to place the action plan and results on a webpage on the organization intranet that is continually updated. The bottom line of doing this well will make conducting the next survey even easier, with higher participation and more candid feedback.