Tag: questionnaire design

Using Open Questions

Most of your hard work and effort has been rightly spent on crafting the closed question items in your staff survey questionnaire – the ones which ask people to respond on a scale of "agree" to "disagree".

After all these will form the bulk of your survey.

They are the backbone of the survey.

They provide the quantitative black and white data that makes your survey talk.

But they don't provide its tone of voice or show how loud it is talking…

The missing piece of the survey voice comes from the write-in comments, the verbatim section, from the open-ended questions.

No professional survey designer would ever consider conducting staff research without offering the respondents a chance to have their say in their own words.

However, I've seen countless examples of badly-worded open questions or questions which you know are never going to elicit any really useful (and actionable) information.

Here are some bad open ended questions…

- Do you have any comments about this survey ?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add ?
- What's the best thing about working here ?

(OK, this last one isn't disastrous, but there's little you can do when respondents tell you they like working at your organisation because "the people are great").

I recommend that your open questions are much more thought provoking and challenging. They should ask for creativity and be positive and upbeat. That way, you're guaranteeing yourself a set of information that you can use and take action with.

Try these alternatives (and get a feel for the difference)

- What's the one practical thing you'd like to change in your department ?
- What ideas do you have for new ways in which your team could be recognised for its efforts within the business ?
- Please make two suggestions for how we could improve the way in which our business communicates with its customers ?

These alternatives are much more upbeat, more focused on a particular issue and even on a particular department or team within the organisation. They will provide the organisation with a set of ideas for action at a very local level which can be worked and moulded into a plan for change and business improvement.

Surely that's so much better than a string of responses in the Any Other Comments? box which say – "No, not really"

What do you think ? Do you have any examples of good or bad open questions ?

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