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Focus

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DIY Surveys

Wise leaders periodically carry out surveys to measure customer perceptions, employee satisfaction, and vendor concerns. Sometimes the best approach is to hire a third party for the research, but a do-it-yourself survey can also be a viable option. Best practice tips for DIY surveys follow.

First, decide if you want a fixed response format, free form "essay" responses, or a mix of both.

Use a Likert (pronounced *lick-urt*) Scale when you want to quantify results. This scale has five response options, from strongly negative to strongly positive. Pollsters frequently use the word agree, as in "strongly agree." The midpoint response is neutral -- neither agree nor disagree. Sometimes no and yes anchor the scale's endpoints, as in "strongly no." I typically use behaviors -- which are open and visible -- when I design surveys, and then use Never on the left end and Always on the right.

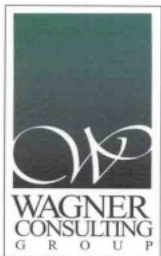
Carefully consider the target audience for the survey results when you design the survey questions. If you want the survey results to motivate employees to change behavior, then define the desired behavior in the survey questions. For example, a customer service survey with the question, "Our office staff is caring, concerned, courteous, and helpful" spells out the desired behavior. High scores -- on the Almost always/Always end -- can be used to celebrate good behavior; scores on the bad end underscore the need to change attitudes. A confidential employee survey on management might include, "[Manager name] gives clear directions with specific expectations."

Prepare in advance for the survey respondent who has no direct knowledge of, or experience with, the subject matter of a question. You don't want respondents to guess, so include an instruction to "Leave blank if you don't know."

Think about the format of the survey's summary analysis during the design phase. Likert Scale results are easy to summarize in a bar chart, pie chart, or tabular format. Narrative responses require some judgement to group them into broad categories, which you want to do because an undifferentiated list of narrative comments is difficult to analyze.

Finally, keep your survey as brief as possible. People dislike long surveys, analysis takes longer on a long survey, and the most important meanings can be obscured when too much data is presented.

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