



# Do-it-yourself safety perception surveys: Six important steps

The fact that perceptions affect safety cultures is undeniable, yet the best intending organizations often pay little attention to perceptions and the conditioning affect they have on new employees or the company.

Whether accurate or not, perceptions become culturally-norming beliefs. When these common beliefs are combined with unclear values, potentially negative attitudes and hypercompetitive priorities, a dangerous mixture of influences is placed on individuals attempting to solve problems in day-to-day operations. The need to understand perceptions and what drives them is critical.

While not fully comprehensive, the following guidelines are designed to be a starting point for developing an internally led perception survey project.

1. Determine goals. What are you trying to accomplish with this, and why? Are the goals collaboratively defined with the different stakeholders? Have you defined what the desirable end result will look like? Upon completion of the survey, what do you expect to experience or gain an understand-

ing of? These answers will help determine how the tool needs to be administered and utilized, and which types of categories and statements will provide you with the desired insight.

2. Define the users and audience. Are you after a group-by-group comparison, or just wanting to understand a few levels in the organization? Are you looking for a sample or targeting closer to 100 percent of the population? Will there be any language or literacy challenges?

3. Define the terminology. What terms do you use to describe events — incidents or accidents? What programs do you desire to gain insight into? What are the words used to describe the groups or levels of individuals? Calling someone a supervisor when they are known as foremen or leaders is quite awkward and can skew the results by changing their feelings toward the survey. Make the terminology fit your organization.

4. Finalize the instrument. Ownership in the findings is enhanced when there is involvement by those receiving the findings. Arrange an opportunity for them to

have input in the final determination of categories, statements, terminology, roll-out strategy, use, look and feel, and reporting format. Consider offering the stakeholders a pilot session to experience the look and feel. Implement their feedback where practical and possible.

5. Administer the survey. Execution at last. Perhaps you are using an online tool, perhaps written or maybe a combination. Surveys can be administered in person, printed or electronically, managed with your internal resources or with the help of third parties or interpreters. Make the method work for you. If it is awkward, complicated, difficult or inflexible, it will compromise the integrity of the feedback or desired sample size.

6. Utilize the results. Perception surveys are important and offer a great measurement indicator of customer or culture. Remember, however, they are never the final or only measurement. Perception surveys only tell you how people feel at that moment in time. They do not tell you why the respondents hold those beliefs or whether they are accurate or not. They do begin to provide insight

into the culture and results. Most importantly, perception surveys can help you focus your questions to better understand why people make decisions and behave the way they do. Utilize the results by using the survey as a gauge to determine where to focus your subsequent questions.

While they can be time-intensive, developing and administering perception surveys is not that difficult. Are perception surveys important to understanding how your organization's culture is influencing their performance? Absolutely. Remember, they are not the final indicator but can certainly help focus the organization in the right direction.

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