Questionnaire Design Tips

https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/managingemployeesurveys.aspx

Keep it short and simple

The number and types of questions asked can significantly influence the survey's response rate. Most experts agree that including too many items, and including items that are confusing or repetitious, can wreck a survey. Instead, survey questions should be simple and short, using terminology familiar to all employees. A general employee survey should contain up to 75 questions and take no longer than 20 to 30 minutes to complete. If the survey is too long, the response rate will likely be very low.

Avoid "double-barreled" items

A survey question should not be "double-barreled"—two topics that are grouped into one question, even though they may be related. An example: "The pay and benefits are excellent at this company." Employees' responses may not yield useful information because they may think pay is great but not benefits, or vice versa, leaving HR managers with no clear follow-up plan. If the survey items are not solidly constructed, the data generated from the survey will not be actionable.

Ask the right questions

Survey design experts advocate the use of items that seek responses based on a numerical scale, such as 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "strongly disagree" and 5 meaning "strongly agree." Some experts recommend asking primarily closed questions—those with a finite number of answers—instead of a fill-in-the-blanks approach. The major problems with including open-ended questions are the volume of data generated and the difficulty grouping and analysing them. Organizations regularly conducting surveys will want to be able to do trending analysis, and open-ended questions make that difficult.

Questions to limit or avoid

Another crucial issue in getting employees to respond year after year is to ask questions that will yield answers on which management can act. Employers should be willing to do away with, or at least limit, "nice-to-know" questions and instead focus on questions essential in understanding what employees think about their workplace.

Demographic questions that ask about gender, race and age should be voluntary to limit fears employees may have about anonymity. These questions are beneficial to include because they give employers insights into emerging group concerns and trends—for example, how older workers prefer to work. However, employees could interpret questions about race or gender as an indication that the employer plans to initiate specific programs targeting those populations.

Use neutral statements

Surveys should be sprinkled with negative statements. If a survey is filled with positive statements such as "My boss is considerate" or "My team is helpful," the results may be unrealistically rosy. Also, leading questions, such as, "Is the staff size too small?" can skew results. Experts also advocate the use of questions about observable behavior to avoid the "social desirability" syndrome—the tendency to give all positive responses to please the inquirer.