Centering Worker Voice in Employer Engagement and Program Design

A Tool for Conducting Worker Surveys for Workforce Organizations

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Introduction: About This Tool

For more than 25 years, the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program (EOP) has explored sector-based workforce programs through applied research and evaluation. We conduct employee surveys to gather input about workers' experiences in the workplace, and to inform workforce practice changes that can help workers and businesses thrive.

In recent years, many workforce organization leaders have expressed interest in learning how to conduct their own worker-focused research and have asked for tools to help them build worker input into design and delivery of programs and business services. This is because both workforce providers and many business leaders recognize that workers hold unique expertise related to business operations, training needs, and process improvements that could enhance retention and business performance. In response, we have developed two tools: this tool for conducting worker surveys, and a guide to conducting worker focus groups. We hope that these tools are helpful to workforce organizations seeking to tap into worker knowledge and to listen and respond to the ideas, needs, and aspirations of frontline workers.

This guide is based on practices we have developed over years of conducting research and is informed by a careful review of several employee surveys, including those developed by Gallup, the Good Jobs Institute, Illinois Manufacturing Extension Partnership, and Civic Works in partnership with Pacific Community Ventures. It is intended to help workforce development professionals partner with local businesses to gather input about frontline workers' experience. There are many ways to gather worker input. This tool provides an example set of survey questions that you can adapt based on the interests and needs of a business and its workforce.

This tool is particularly informed by a recent set of pilot partnerships with workforce organizations in California, Colorado, Iowa, and Maryland. Workforce professionals adapted this survey, conducted worker focus groups, and supported employers to make job quality improvements. These partners made important contributions to this tool and informed the final version you are reading today.

Tips for setting up and conducting employee engagement surveys

Preparing business leaders for a survey[1]

- Establish a go-to internal point of contact at the business to help set up logistics and facilitate communication with the workforce. Ideally, this contact will be a person that you have already built a relationship with who is excited about gathering worker input and prepared to advocate to keep the work moving forward.

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[1] For more information about how to make the business case for conducting a survey to an employer, see our companion tool on Centering Worker Voice in Employer Engagement and Program Design.

Preparing employees for a survey

- Work with business leaders to make sure they are communicating to staff about the purpose of the survey, what they hope to learn, and the logistics (e.g., how long the survey will take, whether it will be administered electronically or on paper, and when and where they should complete it). Encourage them to acknowledge the time that their workers will invest in completing the survey, and express appreciation for workers' participation and input, which will be used to help strengthen the company.

- Encourage business leaders to explain to employees why they are working with a third party to field the survey. This includes explaining that working with an outside organization will ensure individual responses are completely anonymous (nothing will be shared with the employer that can be traced back to an individual or even a small team). Protecting worker confidentiality will encourage more candid input by survey respondents.

Designing the survey

- Limit the number of questions you ask to be respectful of workers' time and increase the likelihood that respondents will complete the entire survey. Our sample survey includes about 30 Likert scale questions, which should take about 15 minutes to complete.

- As you develop survey questions, consider the literacy and English language proficiency of your intended respondents. Consider providing the survey in multiple languages.

Setting up and administering the survey

- Coordinate with the employer to administer the survey during paid time, at a time and place that is convenient and confidential for workers, to increase participation and avoid interfering with work obligations. For example, provide workers with half an hour during an all-staff meeting to complete the survey. Be mindful of power dynamics as you consider whether supervisors will be present where the survey will be administered.

- Determine the final format or platform to administer the survey – either on paper, or through a survey site such as SurveyMonkey or Typeform. When administering the survey, be sure to protect worker confidentiality; the employer should not be able to see individual final responses either on paper or on an online platform.

- Consider providing an incentive, such as refreshments or a gift card, to increase participation and demonstrate that workers' participation is valued.

- If you are administering the survey in person, be sure to adhere to state, local, and organizational guidelines for health and safety related to COVID-19 and other health and safety considerations. Build time into your workplan to accommodate these guidelines.

Talking with business leaders about findings and action steps

- As you prepare to share survey data with the employer, remember the importance of confidentiality. You should share only aggregated data with the employer (rather than individual survey responses) to protect worker privacy.

- The data gathered in a survey may be overwhelming for an employer to take in. You can help make information more digestible by providing a simple analysis in a Word document or slide presentation.

- Your employer contact may need to share survey results internally with other managers before discussing them with you again. Once the employer has had time to consider and vet survey outcomes internally, consider setting up a brainstorming session to discuss follow-up. For example, the employer may ask you to prepare a concise document to share some of the results with workers. Or they may

want to discuss action steps they can take right away to show workers they have been heard as well as consider implications of what they have learned for actions with a longer time horizon.

- Talk with the employer about low-cost, light-lift "quick wins" that they can feasibly implement right away. We have seen that something as simple as tweaking a dress code policy or writing down the onboarding process for a position can have a meaningful impact on job quality and worker engagement.

- The survey process may spark follow-up questions (e.g., why aren't employees aware of promotion opportunities?). If that's the case, you might consider facilitating worker focus groups to gather additional qualitative data about worker perspectives.

Supporting the business to communicate findings and action steps to workers

- To get the most from the survey experience – and ensure that employees feel heard and valued – employers should communicate to workers that they listened to feedback. Encourage business leaders to share a high-level summary of findings, action plans, and associated timelines with all staff to keep the workforce engaged.

Implementing action steps and following up

- If the employer finds the survey process helpful and implements workforce practice changes in response, consider repeating the survey in the future to learn how workers feel after changes are made. This could take the form of a "pulse check," a shorter version of the survey that targets a certain subset of workers (e.g., a division where changes were implemented), or a full survey six to twelve months after implementation of changes.

Sample opening survey language

Overview

[BUSINESS NAME] leadership team has partnered with [WORKFORCE ORGANIZATION] to gather your feedback on the following topics:

- Your understanding of the company
- Training, growth, and opportunities
- Workplace relationships and culture
- Job satisfaction

This feedback process is part of a project between [BUSINESS NAME] and [WORKFORCE ORGANIZATION], which focuses on improving workers' experience at [BUSINESS NAME] to support business success. The first step in the pilot is better understanding your experience as a member of the [BUSINESS NAME] team to identify and prioritize ways to make your job better and ensure that [BUSINESS NAME] can grow and succeed. Results from this feedback process will be shared out in summary form and discussed with management to give you opportunities to influence the business and your experience at work.

Confidentiality

Any information you provide in this survey is confidential. We will not personally identify you with any of the information you provide.

Sample survey questions

Understanding the Company

Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.
Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neither Agree nor Disagree (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5)

1.	I understand the company's mission and goals.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
2.	It is clear to me how my role supports the mission and goals.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
3.	I have a clear understanding of my job and responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Training, Growth, and Opportunities

Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.
Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neither Agree nor Disagree (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5)

1.	I have the training to do my job well.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
2.	I have opportunities to learn and develop new skills.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
3.	I have opportunities to move into a higher paying position.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
4.	I understand what is required of me to move into a higher paying position.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
5.	There is a fair process for how people get promoted.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Workplace Relationships and Culture

Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.
Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neither Agree nor Disagree (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5)

1.	I can share feedback and ideas at work, and they are heard.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
2.	I understand what my manager expects from me on a day-to-day basis.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
3.	In the last week, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
4.	My manager is available to answer my questions and help me with my work.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
5.	I am able to maintain good relationships with my coworkers to get our work done.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
6.	I feel physically safe at my workplace.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
7.	I feel emotionally safe at my workplace.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
8.	I am comfortable voicing my opinion at work.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Job Satisfaction

Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.
Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neither Agree nor Disagree (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5)

	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
1. I am satisfied with my overall job security.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
2. I am paid enough at this job to cover my basic living expenses.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
3. I have a schedule that meets my needs and matches the demands of my life.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
4. I am satisfied with the number of hours that I am scheduled to work.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
5. I am satisfied with the amount of notice I am given for my work schedule.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
6. My employer provides me with the benefits I need (e.g., medical, dental, paid leave).	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
7. I understand how to access my benefits.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
8. I know who to go to if I have questions about my benefits.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
9. I am able to take time off when I need to.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
10. I have just the right amount of work to complete on a given workday.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
11. I am supported by my coworkers and supervisors.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
12. I would recommend this company to a family member or friend looking for a job.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

13. I see myself working here in:

    1-3 months   3-6 months   6-12 months

    1-5 years   5+ years

{OPTIONAL} Demographic Questions

What is your age?

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65-74
- ☐ 75+

What is your gender identity?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Nonbinary
- ☐ Transgender Male
- ☐ Transgender Female
- ☐ Other {text box}
- ☐ Prefer Not to Answer

What is your race/ethnicity? Please select all that apply.

☐ Black or African American

☐ Asian or Asian-American

☐ Latinx or Hispanic

☐ White

☐ Native American or Alaska Native

☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

☐ Other {text box}

☐ Prefer Not to Answer

What is your highest level of education attainment?

☐ Less than HS

☐ HS Degree or Equivalent

☐ Some College

☐ Associate Degree

☐ Bachelor's Degree

☐ Graduate Degree

☐ Trade School

☐ Prefer Not to Answer

How long have you been with the company?

☐ Less than 3 months

☐ 3 to 6 months

☐ 6 months to 1 year

☐ 1 to 2 years

☐ 2 or more years

{OPTIONAL} Additional Feedback

Is there anything else you'd like to share about the business and how it could be more successful moving forward?

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