# Designing Great Employee Surveys

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Ask better questions - get better insights

A big part of employee's answers depends on the quality of the survey's design and construction. Building the right survey is a challenge: you need to find the right question, the right length, the right sample, the right periodicity...

Don't run the risk of bad decisions due to bad survey design. In this ebook, find the fundamental principles to build successful employee surveys and get the most out of them.
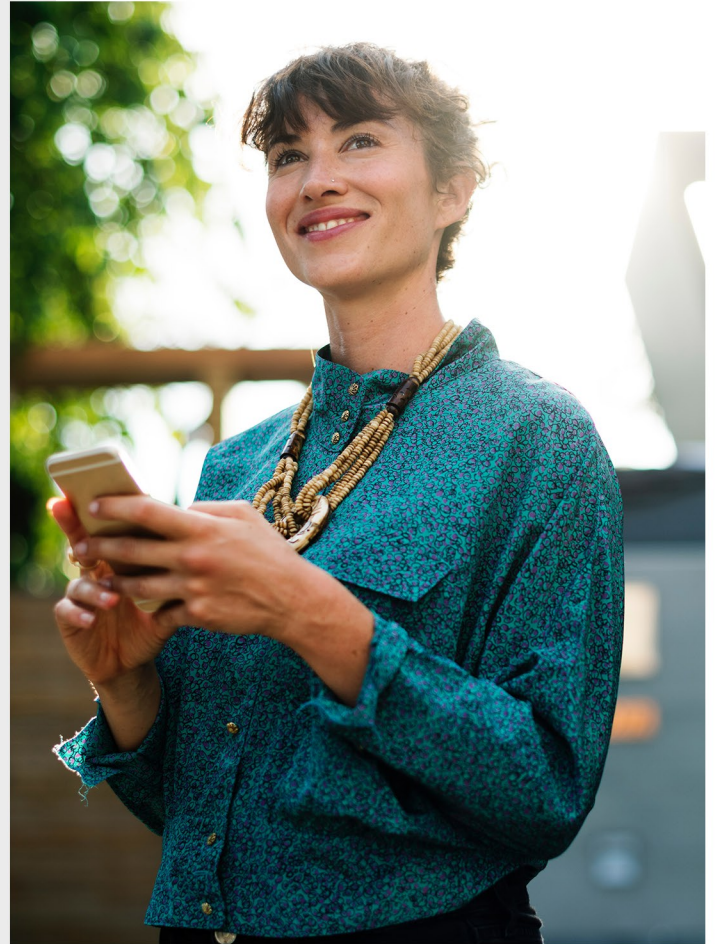
1. Define the desired outcome

2. Articulate questions

3. Avoid GIGO

4. Increase participation rate

1. Define the desired outcome

Before thinking about the question types, start listing the outcomes you want to find out. Start anywhere, take a stand, it doesn't matter if it's right or wrong at this stage.

Example of outcomes:

- You want to find out why employees seem to be complaining a lot

- You want to assess employee knowledge about the benefits programme

From the outcome you want, build a hypothesis. A hypothesis is just a fancy way of describing your best guess of what the truth is. It doesn't need to be right.
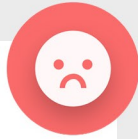
Depending on the nature of this hypothesis, you may consider sharing it with business leaders to gain understanding and buy-in for the survey.
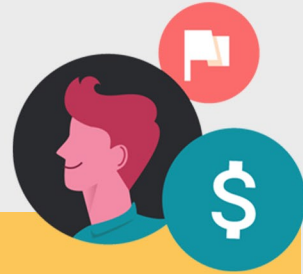
A good hypothesis:

✔ Is not the research question

✔ Is a statement

✔ Use clear language

✔ Is "testable"

Bad hypothesis:

"What do new joiners think about working at Strangefruit Corp?"

Better hypothesis:

"People leave Strangefruit Corp in the first 90 days if they are not successfully engaged by their hiring manager."

You are not done yet.

Before crafting any question you still need to define the sample and the periodicity.

1. Do you need to survey everyone or just a relevant or random sample?

2. Would there be value in repeating the survey and how often should you be measuring?

Once you have chosen your hypothesis and defined the sample and the frequency you can start to develop the survey. However, make sure that each question contributes to the desired outcome.

2. Articulate questions

Every question sends a signal. Questions send indications to the employees on which concern HR or managers are investigating. You should keep this in mind when you are crafting your survey.
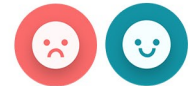
There are two types of questions depending on the outcome you need to figure out: objective or subjective. Both provide different kinds of data.

Objective questions are used to quantify and collect data. Subjective questions, on the other hand, measure feedback, feelings, and emotions.

Objective

"I have attended a company town hall in the last 6 months."

Yes / No

Subjective

"I trust my direct manager."

Strongly Agree --> Strongly Disagree

There are many types of survey questions. The type of information you need will influence your choice of survey type.

Objecive questions

Closed-ended (Yes / No)

I have had a developmental conversation with my boss in the past 3 months.

Multiple Choice

Which of the following was most important in your decision to join Strangefruit?

Demographic

Please click on the department you work for.

Subjective questions

Likert scale

How likely is it that you would recommend Strangefruit Corp to a friend or colleague.

Open-ended

If you could change one thing about the culture, what would it be?

Additional tips

1. Be clear and understandable. Use everyday language and be precise.

2. Ask one thing at a time

3. Avoiding GIGO

"Garbage in, garbage out" is a reminder that the return on investment when conducting survey is influenced by the quality of the survey itself.

The risk of collecting nonsense output is high and can lead to bad decisions.

5 tips to avoid GIGO

1. Reassure on response **confidentiality**.

2. KISS: "keep it simple, stupid".

3. **Recency bias:** the tendency to prefer the first or last option provided - Your answers need to appear in a random order.

4. **Social desirability bias:** respondent often provides answer which is more socially acceptable.

5. **Framing effects:** responses are made upon how the information is presented.

Quick guide on what **not to ask** in your employee Survey

Loaded question: "Do you agree that there are more people leaving Strangefruit because of the recent salary revision exercise?"

Double-barrelled question: "I am satisfied with the coaching and training opportunities at Strangefruit."

Biased question: "Do you think that Mr CEO has been doing a wonderful job at Strangefruit in the past quarter?"

Assumptive question: (to a general audience) "Do you think the maternity leave benefit is sufficient?"

2nd Hand Knowledge question: "Is our company culture the right one for our current business environment?"

Hypothetical question: "Would you be more likely to stay at Strangefruit if we split the annual bonus into quarterly payouts?"

3. Increase participation rate

Communication & follow-up

Communicate the intent of the programme before the first survey. Ideally, have this delivered by the most senior person in the company, and at the very least the head of HR. Emphasise confidentiality of responses, and focus on how team-level issues are affecting individuals and can be resolved, instead of conducting witch-hunts.

Once the survey starts, keep closing the loop between results and follow up actions.

Simplify the experience

Keep the survey short and sweet, and easily accessible on mobile. Allow managers to acknowledge and clarify responses (especially open-ended ones) anonymously.

Key takeaways

1. Define the desired outcome:
   Start with a hypothesis, set sample & frequency

2. Articulate questions: keep to best practices

3. Avoid GIGO: Mind what not to ask

4. Increase participation rate: Over-communicate "Why"

5. Make it easy for employees