

Workforce attitude surveys

IF you want to make progress with low-cost and no-cost energy savings, a staff attitude and awareness survey is a very useful place to start. The results can at times be surprising, providing useful insights into the opportunities available to you as well as warnings about unforeseen pitfalls. This makes it far more likely that your next steps – a motivation campaign and a training programme – will succeed.

Before describing a recent survey as an example, I will explain how I go about these jobs. I like to start with a couple of days doing short face-to-face interviews with a cross-section of employees “from top floor to shop floor” and spanning a variety of job functions. These are informal, unstructured ten to twenty minute chats where my job is to prompt and listen. I get people to talk freely and frankly, partly by undertaking not to associate them by name with any remarks that I subsequently quote. As well as establishing facts like job categorisations and organisational structure, I am looking out for other snippets that will help to shape my approach to the subsequent company-wide questionnaire: have people had negative experiences with suggestion schemes? Do they suffer from initiative overload? What specific issues are currently preoccupying them at work? Are there any ‘hooks’ like charity work on which to hang future incentive schemes?

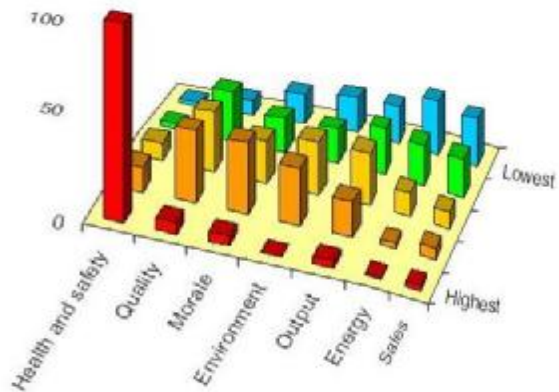
Armed with this background, I will then devise a survey questionnaire, ideally just a single page. On-line forms are proving to be a great tool in terms of speed of turnaround: in the most recent survey I have conducted, 300 out of 1,100 staff responded within two working days of launch. Speed of analysis is another advantage. In the case I am going on to describe, I telephoned the client in the morning for permission to close the survey, and the analysis was complete by the end of the working day. Quick end-to-end turnaround means timely service at an affordable price. Better still, an on-line survey can be left open

and the client can reactivate it a year or more later. Because responses are time-stamped, the analyst can do “before and after” comparisons. We can even leave the client with an Excel workbook which retrieves the stored responses and enables him or her to analyse them without outside assistance.

The particular case history concerns a manufacturing company with several hundred staff, operating moderately energy-intensive processes around the clock. During initial interviews, I learned for example that morale was generally good. Much was also made of their system of communication whereby daily and weekly plant meetings at operator and manager level were used to ‘cascade’ information up and down the hierarchy. When the survey was released, however, interim monitoring showed poor rates of response from shift workers. It transpired that functional and shift-team briefing meetings had been discontinued in some areas, so news of the survey had not got through to them. A fresh effort was made to elicit their views, but an important lesson had meanwhile been learned: *that a key mechanism for people-based projects was not functioning as assumed.*

This was one of two negative findings, the other being that people did not attach any importance to energy saving at work -- even though they were concerned about it at home and had mostly taken all the reasonable steps.

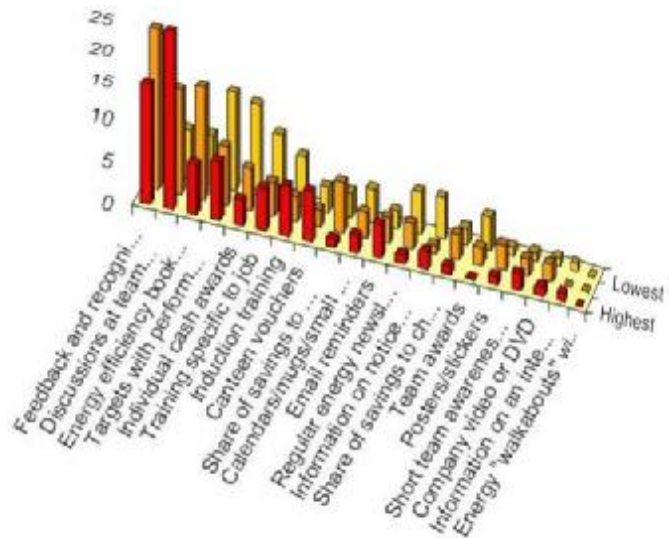
What they were concerned about at work was health and safety. The diagram on the right shows this: asked to rank important issues, health and safety was overwhelmingly voted top. Energy was usually fourth or fifth, and half of respondents did not pick it at all.



The above diagram shows the way forward. It can be seen that a lot of people put quality, morale, and environment in second or third place. Our conclusion was that energy, if associated with these issues, would get more

attention. This is not difficult to achieve. For a start, energy can obviously be stressed as an important environmental topic. Secondly, methods used for continuously improving *quality* can be applied to energy as well, whether through statistical process control as a monitoring and targeting tool, or through team-based initiatives, balanced-scorecard techniques, or whatever. Crucially, it has been found elsewhere that a wilting quality improvement programme can be reinvigorated by turning its focus to energy waste as a quality defect. What about *morale*? The link here is that people-based energy projects would increase the need for communication, and provide a fresh challenge for workplace teams, both of which are known to promote morale.

The value of *intangible* incentives was another surprise to come out of the survey. Respondents' ideas of what would motivate them was quite different from what we would have guessed. The figure on the right shows that they valued two incentives above all others: "feedback and recognition", and "discussion at team meetings". Cash incentives hardly featured (although shift workers were more likely to nominate cash, they still made it a poor third to feedback, recognition, and discussion at team meetings). Furthermore, you can see that some of the things we suggested -- like promotional gifts, posters and stickers -- were flatly rejected. The conclusions: firstly, the company can easily motivate people without spending money; and secondly, the decline of their cascade briefing system is a big problem that we detected just in time.



We also learned that very few obstacles stand in the company's way. Hardly any respondents said they would be unwilling to change working procedures; a lot said they

just did not know where to start, and perceived a lack of leadership and policy.
Production operators, unsurprisingly, tended to want some training.

All in all, it was good news for the company, and everyone now has a clear view of what needs to be done to bring energy-saving up the agenda, motivate people to work in a more energy-conscious way, and enable them to achieve savings. We also know how to avoid wasting money in the process. If you are wondering how your own workforce would reply to similar questions, I have just two words of advice: ask them.

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