

# STRATEGIC EMPLOYEE SURVEYS

EVIDENCE-BASED GUIDELINES *for*  
DRIVING ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS

JACK W. WIDEY



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They have a clearly articulated vision, mission, and value system.

They believe in performance management—that is, holding executive and ...

They understand the employee-customer-performance dynamic—that customer and ...

They faithfully measure what matters and share the results with staff.

They have persistence.

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# Strategic Employee Surveys

Jack W. Wiley

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*I dedicate this book to Mom and to the loving memory of Dad, parents not blessed with the same opportunities they made sure to provide their children.*

# Preface

This book deals with the subject of how to think about designing and implementing an employee survey program. I draw the ideas presented from my thirty-five years of experience of doing this work. During that time frame, I have supported organizations in almost all major industries and in most of the major economies around the world. For several years, I have wanted to record my ideas about the employee survey process and how to ensure its effectiveness, but it was not until 2002 that I developed the Strategic Survey Model. The model gave me the framework needed for organizing my thoughts and observations.

As both a researcher and a practitioner, I know the employee survey process can be a very powerful tool for organization development. In essence, this book speaks to the two elements of a survey program that most differentiate between successful and unsuccessful initiatives, the two elements that most impinge on the power of an employee survey process to bring about desired change. The first of these elements is the survey instrument itself. Does the instrument truly measure what is important to an organization's leadership? If it does, leadership will be interested in using the views of employees to drive change and strengthen the organization. If it does not, the survey results will provoke a "so what and who cares" reaction. Under those circumstances, nothing or very little will happen because the survey did not measure what was important and did not energize management to take action. I devote the first part of the book to reviewing why organizations conduct surveys and especially to connecting survey purpose to the overarching strategy of the

organization. I present examples of how to measure most of the major topics found in employee surveys today.

The survey feedback and follow-up process is the second element that most distinguishes between successful and unsuccessful survey initiatives. Organizations should think through very carefully the process for how they will use the results of a survey, and this should occur well in advance of the launch of the survey itself. The survey feedback and action planning process is like a tool in the hands of a carpenter. Even a skilled carpenter does not master the use of a tool the first time he or she picks it up. The same is true for organizations. It takes practice to achieve proficiency in the use of the survey feedback and action planning process to drive change. Even so, the thoughtful organization can sidestep some pitfalls. Part Two of the book is devoted to laying out a time-tested and proven approach to survey feedback and action planning. I identify key pitfalls to avoid and offer suggestions for how to maximize the power of the follow-up process to strengthen the organization.

This book is not about the details of running a survey program. There are several good books available on this topic. Certainly, the lack of effective project planning can hamper if not destroy a survey initiative. One should never underestimate the importance of using sound judgment in the overall management of a survey project. This book, however, is about what I believe are the higher-order decisions: ensuring the survey program supports business strategy, that what gets measured by the survey instrument matters, and using the survey results to make lasting improvements.

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On a day-to-day basis, there are many coworkers, both past and present, from whom I have learned. They represent some of the finest survey practitioners our field has to offer and include Scott Brooks, Bruce Campbell, Bill Erickson, Jeff Jolton, Stephanie Kendall, Kyle Lundby, Jeff Saltzman, and Sara Weiner. In the development of this book, and particularly in the quoting of norms-based research, I am grateful to my fellow researchers within the Kenexa Research Institute, Anne Herman and Brenda Kowske. For supporting the book in an overall sense, I am thankful to several Kenexa executives including Mike Dolen, Jim

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