



Surveys

by Don Brown, Vice President, Conway Management Company

One of the most important decisions management can make is what to work on for improvement. As we all know, many organizations are working hard on the wrong things. In order to help organizations select the right things to work on, particularly in the areas of human relations and customer satisfaction, Conway Management assists organizations to conduct two basic types of surveys:

- Employee Opinion Surveys
- External Customer Surveys

An important benefit of surveys is change measurement. How does management know that what they are doing is effective without baseline and trend measurement of employee and external customer satisfaction? By measuring satisfaction prior to change intervention and again, after intervention, management has a good scientific yardstick to see if the change has affected employee or external customer satisfaction and the extent of that effect.

Data shows that there is a direct relationship between customer satisfaction and both customer return and recommend rates resulting in increased market share. Equally, increased employee satisfaction leads to higher productivity, better customer service, retention and lower sick leave, compensation claims and job related injuries.

Employee Opinion Surveys

Our basic eighty-five item questionnaire measures five critical dimensions of each organization:

- human relations policies/ programs,
- organizational environment,
- department environment,
- morale, and
- internal customer satisfaction.

This questionnaire has years of research and analysis underlying it. Based on years of experience in providing survey services, we have found that each of our customers has a unique set of requirements. This has led us to develop customer specific survey design options. We can create hybrid questionnaires using items from our basic survey instrument together with specific questions selected by the customer and/or Conway Management to precisely target issues that are important for management to understand.

Another important consideration in designing a survey instrument is the selection of demographics. Organizations often wish to understand the differences in employee opinion based upon length of service, gender, department, geographic location, and whether employees are salaried or hourly, full time or part-time, etc.

In addition to the specific ques-

tions contained on the survey instrument, many organizations request we include open ended questions, such as:

- *What do you like best about working for ABC Company?*
- *What do you like least about working for ABC Company?*
- *If you could change one thing at ABC Company, what would it be?*

While it is possible to do an accurate and statistically sound Employee Opinion Survey by the random sample method, we rarely recommend this approach. The basic negative is that all employees know the survey is being conducted; those not asked to participate often conclude that their opinion is not important and, therefore, the employee is not important. So, we strongly recommend that whenever possible, every employee be afforded the opportunity to participate in the survey and have their opinion counted. Although 100% of the employees are asked to participate and respond, the average response rate is about 75%.

Often people are concerned about confidentiality of their responses. In order to provide confidentiality, the survey response forms are normally mailed directly to Conway Management in pre-addressed and postage-paid envelopes. As an alternative to written surveys, some customers have opted to use a secure website to have their employees complete the survey.

The responses to the written questions are optically scanned

into our statistical software for analysis. The statistical software package performs tests for: Mean Score Frequency Distribution, Chi Square Analysis, Linear Association, Regression Analysis, etc. The results are then analyzed by a social scientist and a senior business executive. The responses to the open ended questions are individually read and tabulated. The responses are then separated into specific headings.

A written report is prepared detailing the results together with observations and recommendations for improvement. Depending upon the demographics developed, the written report will breakout the results by demographic heading. One of Conway Management's senior associates will meet with management to discuss the results, answer specific questions and help develop an action plan to address the weaknesses/concerns raised by the survey.

External Customer Surveys

Organizations of all types (industrial, service, government, health care) recognize the need to improve their level of external customer satisfaction. However, many organizations collect little hard statistical data about the external customer's perceptions. The lack of good data makes it almost impossible for management to target the things to improve—the right things to work on. The External Customer Survey provides a tool for management to understand what the external customer is thinking and what the

external customer wants improved. Several studies have concluded that only 4% of dissatisfied customers complain—the remainder just don't come back.

Many organizations make a mistake when they refer to quality, only thinking about the quality of the product or service which they provide to their external customers. When *customers* are judging their suppliers, they think about much more. They look at the following characteristics as indicators of quality suppliers:

- *How easy is it to place an order with ABC Company?*
- *How many times do we abandon a call due to a busy signal?*
- *How knowledgeable are the people who sell to us or take our orders?*
- *How well does the supplier execute change orders?*
- *How accurate are the invoices and other documentation?*
- *How responsive are the technical, customer service and administrative people at ABC?*

The basic External Customer Survey is a thirty-item questionnaire which measures the critical concerns of the external customer through the eyes of the external customer. Like the Employee Opinion Surveys, Conway Management is able to create hybrid questionnaires using items from our basic survey instrument together with specific questions selected by the client and/or Conway Management.

Consideration in selecting the demographics is important. Understanding the differences in distribution/selling channels, geographic location, type of function/person placing the order, type of service or product purchased etc. will help focus on the improvements required.

A statistical approach to surveying external customers is used. We normally survey between 8% and 10% of the external customer base. This level can provide an accurate picture of the external customer base with regard to their perceptions of the client organization.

The survey instrument is mailed directly to the external customer by either Conway Management (using the external customer list provided by the client) or by the client. In either option, the response is mailed directly to Conway Management in a pre-addressed and stamped envelope provided with the survey instrument. As an alternative, customers can use a confidential secure website to provide responses to survey questions.

For both Employee and External Customer Surveys, reports with observations, recommendations for improvement and action items are available within four weeks after survey responses are received by Conway.

Please call if you have questions or would like more information about how you can use Conway surveys to help your organization.