Governing Principles for Creating an Effective Employee Survey

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& company

1. ASK PEOPLE QUESTIONS THEY CAN ANSWER

This may require that some types of questions (e.g., those pertaining to "management systems" such as leadership succession) be asked of only a subset of employees (those who are knowledgeable about the issue at hand).

2. ASK HYPOTHESIS-DRIVEN QUESTIONS

There needs to be good reason to believe that the item addressed in the question predicts (i.e., is a driver of) a key outcome of interest (e.g., employee engagement, safety, sales).

3. ASK "FACT-BASED" QUESTIONS

Avoid opinions, attitudes and believes, as they tend to be more varied and less predictive.

4. ONLY ASK QUESTIONS IF YOU'RE WILLING TO ACT ON THE ANSWERS

Asking a question creates an expectation on the part of respondents that you will act on the answer. So if, for example, you are unwilling to raise your salary structure, be cautious about asking people whether they are satisfied with their salary.

5. QUESTIONS EITHER NEED TO PRODUCE ACTIONABLE INSIGHT OR SERVE AS AN "OUTCOME" MEASURE

If the answer to a question does not either tell you what to do or how well you have done something, then it probably should not be asked (e.g., questions about employees' personal matters or relationships over which you have no control).

6. LIMIT THE NUMBER OF QUESTIONS YOU ASK

15 minutes is at the outer limit of how long people can reasonably be expected to respond attentively. This corresponds to approximately 120 questions. If it is absolutely necessary to ask more questions, then randomly assigning respondents to receive different subsets of questions can be considered as an alternative.

McBassi is a human capital analytics firm that helps organizations improve their performance through more effective management and development of people. Our services include analytics, employee surveys, and assisting organizations in tackling other major people-related issues.