TECO Energy, Inc.

Manager's Guide to Survey Feedback

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Employee & Organizational Development ❖ Human Resources

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About the Employee Opinion Survey

Change...Competition...Service...Teamwork...Restructuring...

Many of us might sometimes tire of hearing these words. We cannot, however, ignore the facts—the business world *is* changing. The utility industry, in particular, is undergoing fundamental change. Not only is the amount of change much greater than ever before, but the *rate* of change has dramatically quickened. One observer has likened this to a river rafting trip where we are all in "permanent whitewater."

In this era of deep and rapid change, however, some companies *are* excelling. While there is no one quick and easy "recipe" for success, organizations that are "winners" in the '90's have a few things in common: they *live* Customer service, and they not only *say* (like almost everyone these days) that "employees are our most important resource," they *act* like they mean it!

In order to succeed, we must, then, translate into action the *Values We Share,* written for us in the TECO Energy corporate goals brochure. Note, especially, the section on Employees:

> "Employees serve Customers, whatever their roles in the company. Dedicated, motivated, team-spirited employees service Customers well. We cultivate such employees by treating them right, heeding their opinions and keeping them informed. And we stimulate their creativity and productivity through training and development, opportunities for career growth, a safe and healthy work environment and fair compensation."

This is what the *1994 Employee Opinion Survey* is all about. It isn't designed to be a "happiness index" of some sort. Nor is it designed to be another formal Human Resources program. Rather, it is a *tool to foster two-way communication about important work issues related to corporate success.* It is a way of letting us know how we're doing at translating the wonderful values above into real actions.

Using a custom questionnaire developed by a task force of company managers, solid information is provided about:

- Aspects of our organization that employees feel positive about, and those which are viewed less favorably.
- Opportunities for improving productivity.

- Policies and procedures which might require review or which may need to be communicated more effectively.

This information is obtained in *two* ways: by reviewing the employee survey responses contained in the results reports, and by meeting with employees to discuss the meaning behind the numbers and plan appropriate actions to resolve key issues. *Both components are essential to the process*.

As a manager, your responsibilities in the employee opinion survey process include:

- Working with the survey results report for your unit or department to obtain your own personal understanding of the results.
- Meeting with employees reporting to you to candidly review the results of the survey.
- Encouraging discussions of actual or perceived work problems and possibilities for making constructive changes.
- Avoiding the temptation to oversimplify or dismiss the survey results.

A large amount of time and effort has been invested in the survey process. The return on this investment depends on how you and your employees use the information.

The purpose of this *Manager's Guide* is to provide you with the skill and confidence to effectively fulfill your role in the survey process.

Why conduct a survey?

Can't skilled managers get the same kind of information, in better detail, just by "walking around" and talking to employees? Sometimes, but not always. The employee opinion survey serves to *complement* formal and informal lines of communication in a unique way. Every employee within the company has been asked, in effect:

- What are the key problems you face in doing your job?
- What do you need in order to help you do a better job?
- What can be done to increase your satisfaction with your work and with the organization?

In short, employees are asked to describe both the favorable and less favorable aspects of working for the organization. Since employees *are* the organization, there is no one better to identify its strengths and its problems.

In a perfect world, an employee survey would perhaps be unnecessary. In the real world, however, employees are often hesitant to speak openly about work-related problems that they feel might exist. Employee surveys are conducted to efficiently gather the candid opinions of all employees. A 1989 article in *Fortune* entitled "The Trust Gap" put it succinctly:

> "If you don't now survey employee attitudes, start. What you will find will help you identify problems before they become crises."

The employee opinion survey has a number of *objectives:*

- To assess the perceptions, feelings, and opinions of employees in the organization.
- To open the lines of communication with every employee, even those hesitant to openly express their ideas and concerns.
- To reinforce employee participation and involvement.
- To determine communication needs.
- To assist in constructive-problem solving.
- To help measure the success of recently implemented policies, procedures, and programs.
- To assess trends over time. How much are we changing, and are the changes in the desired direction?
- To assist in establishing strategic priorities.
- To provide an *objective* foundation for corporate culture change efforts.

Experience by other organizations has shown that these goals are certainly achievable. But it is *up to you to make it happen.*

The survey process

There are a number of types of employee surveys. The least successful type is one where a standard "off the shelf" questionnaire is filled out by employees (either all of them or, generally, a random sample). Typically, the results are then tallied, presented to top management, discussed in some detail, then filed away and promptly forgotten. With this type of survey, even when executive management attempts to address issues that arise, the potential value of the process goes largely unrealized.

The TECO Energy *strategic* survey approach goes far beyond this type of effort, in a number of ways. Figure 1 outlines the key stages in the process.

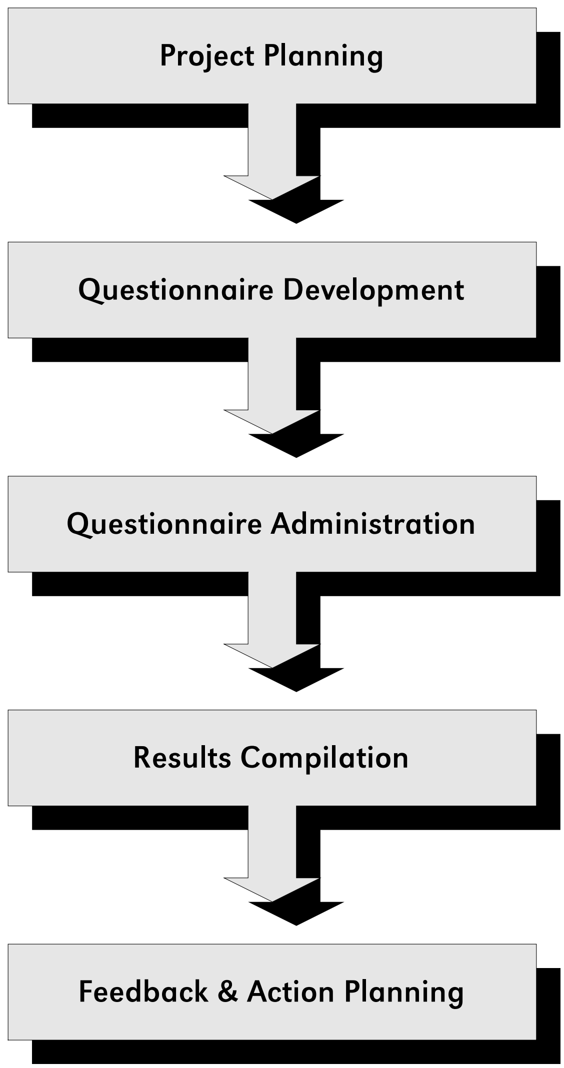


Figure 1. The survey process.

Project planning

One of the cornerstones of our survey process is that it is line management driven—it is *not* an effort of the Human Resources department. A project task force was formed in mid-1993, consisting of one manager nominated by each officer. The members of the task force are:

Michelle Adler........ Corporate Communications

Anthony Antinori ...	Human Resources
Rod Burkhardt	Energy Resources Planning
Craig Cameron	TECO Energy/TECO Power Services
Russ Chapman	Rates & Regulatory Control
Chuck Drake...........	Production
Kathy Fogle	Corporate Communications
Malcolm Hall..........	Customer Services & Marketing
Ginny Jones	Information/Technology Engineering
Leonard Porter	Transmission & Distribution
Marney Schrock	Corporate & Operating Services
Liz Townes	Finance
Bill Waldron...........	Human Resources

Theses individuals are, in essence, responsible for coordinating the entire survey process within their departments. The role of Human Resources is to provide overall coordination and direction to the effort. Within each department, the task force representative worked with the departmental Vice President to determine such key issues as:

- How should the department be broken down into work units for survey reporting and feedback purposes?
- How should the survey be administered within the department?
- Who needs to be involved in the survey effort?

They are also responsible for ensuring that feedback and action planning run smoothly across the company.

Questionnaire development

A generic, "off-the-shelf" survey questionnaire would not allow us to attain our survey objectives. Rather, the task force members designed a customized set of questions relevant to the information needs of our company.

The questionnaire was designed from the ground up, with only a core set of items retained from the 1990 survey so that comparisons could be made over time. The goal was to make the questionnaire as relevant as possible to what is happening within the company *now*.

Especially in a survey like ours, where all employees across the company are participating, not every important issue can be addressed—many are specific to particular work units or departments. For this reason, an open-ended section was added to the survey, where employees could write in any additional comments that they wanted to share directly with top management. In this way, significant issues or concerns which aren't addressed elsewhere on the questionnaire can be identified.

Finally, a section asking for demographic information was included. This allows for breaking down employee opinions in a number of different ways, to see if certain groups of employees have special concerns that might otherwise get "lost in the crowd." This demographic information is used only for these analyses, and is not included on any of the standard survey results reports that are prepared for individual units and departments.

Questionnaire administration

The specific manner of survey administration was left up to each department. In determining the best method, however, each task force member was accountable for:

- Obtaining a high response rate
- Maintaining absolute confidentiality of responses, and
- Minimizing disruptions to the business.

One overall decision was made, however: the questionnaire would be administered on company time, rather than taken home. Why? Inevitably, when surveys are mailed to or taken home, low response rates are achieved—50% would be doing extremely well. Not only is the response low using this type of administration, but it is usually biased in favor of those who hold negative opinions (who want to make *sure* to express them). This leads, quite logically, to results that aren't taken very seriously!

Having people fill out the survey on company time also demonstrates the company's commitment to the survey process. It is clearly an investment in employee communications.

In order to give everyone a chance to participate, while not disrupting departmental operations, a six-week period was allowed for administration of the survey.

Results compilation

As mentioned earlier, each department decided how their results would be broken down for reporting results. Some smaller departments (e.g., Human Resources) used no sub-units at all, while others broke themselves out into a large number of units. There are pros and cons to each approach, which were thoroughly discussed within the task force before individual members made their decisions.

In order to identify responses as belonging to a particular department and work unit, a code number was printed on each survey answer sheet. A range of these code numbers was assigned to each of the survey units, corresponding to its size (i.e., number of employees). The appropriate sets of numbered answer sheets were provided to the task force members for use within their departments. As questionnaires were completed throughout the company, they were returned to Employee & Organizational Development and optically scanned into a computer database. The code number from each answer sheet was read into the data file along with the item responses. This allows results compilation for each unit and department, by specifying the appropriate code number ranges to the program written to generate the statistics.

The employee comments were sent to an outside survey company for entry into a separate database. These comments were compiled—verbatim—into reports for each officer.

All survey documents were shredded after processing.

Every effort was made to compile the data and produce results reports as quickly as possible. While it may seem that too long was taken, consider that over 150 separate groupings of data had to be analyzed, with corresponding reports generated.

Feedback and action planning

According to the Hay Group, as many as half of all medium-sized and large U.S. companies periodically survey their employees. Lots of time and money go into these efforts...but, only those companies who follow through with survey feedback and action-planning get a return on this investment.

Listen to Peter Gelfond, managing Director of Hay Research for Management:

> "Clearly, the best-run, most respected companies in America—such as Disney and Merck—all conduct regular surveys and use the information they get to more effectively organize and manage their people."

Why doesn't everyone do it? In a recent Hay national survey of over 1,000 corporate HR professionals, those who worked in companies that have never conducted a survey were asked why not. Their answers, presented below in Figure 2, are revealing:

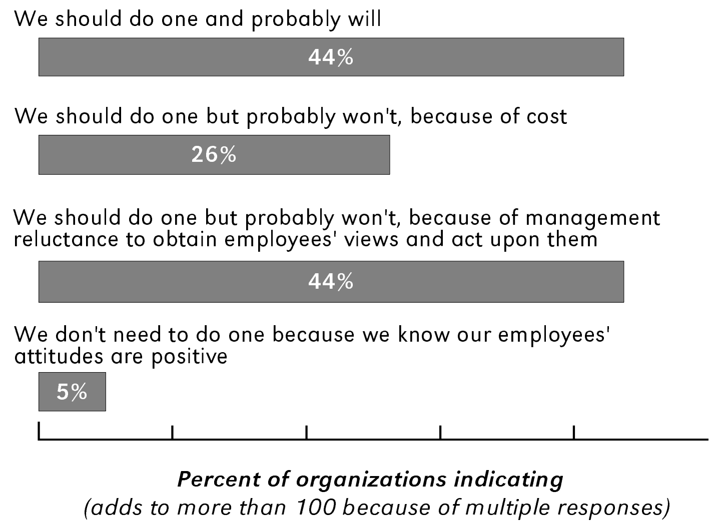


Figure 2. Why some organizations don't survey their employees.

In a way, you might say that those companies who aren't willing to gather and act upon employees' opinions are "smart." That is, if their management is unwilling to listen—and act upon—survey results, then they truly are better off *not* doing a survey. Of course, the organizations that take this "ostrich" approach to employee communication and involvement are exactly the ones we want to be competing with!

If an organization does decide to conduct an employee survey, why is feedback and action planning so important? After all, the numbers are already in; why waste time and effort which could more profitably be spent implementing the obvious *solutions?*

It's quite simple: the "numbers" from the survey results reports indicate *what* employees feel and believe. Feedback meetings, however, are used to learn *why* employees have these attitudes and opinions. Both types of information are necessary to generate appropriate solutions. Attempting to take action without a full understanding is generally ineffectual, or worse—when managers generate the wrong solutions to the wrong problems. It can be likened to a medical doctor trying to treat a patient without any discussion of the person's medical history—only knowing "what hurts." To follow this analogy, the survey results provide the symptoms, but you need to know much more if you're going to effectively treat the condition.

The feedback process also has a direct impact on employee buy-in to the process. For instance, in a recent study conducted by Management Decision Systems (MDS) in a large manufacturing firm, 84 percent of employees in locations where no survey feedback was provided felt that the survey results "would not be utilized well," compared to only 11 percent of the employees who received feedback.

Who provides the feedback, and *how* it is provided, also make a big difference. We strongly recommend that, unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise, the feedback be conducted by the heads of the units for which results are provided. The willingness of the manager to openly share the results enhances his or her credibility, as well as that of the survey process. More importantly, in these feedback and action planning meetings, many—if not most—of the issues which come up can be handled within the unit...they aren't major corporate-wide issues. Having the manager run the meeting can result in on-the-spot action planning to resolve these issues.

In the MDS study mentioned earlier, employees overwhelmingly preferred feedback in small department (unit) meetings; large group meetings and written feedback were less well-received. In locations holding unit meetings, subsequent surveys showed significant improvements in employee attitudes about the company, management, and the survey process itself—there were no such increases under other feedback methods.

How do our own employees feel? The following are some typical perspectives from the written comments received during the 1990 Tampa Electric employee opinion survey:

> "I feel that a survey is a valuable tool if things are acted upon. I hope to see lots of good come of this survey and hope to see more in the future."
>
> "Thank you for the opportunity of maybe voicing a small part of our feelings to someone. I only hope that someone somewhere will take the time to listen."
>
> "I don't believe this survey will have any bearing on my job. It will still be the same old #$@%!"

We see a range of opinions, then: some hopeful optimism, a bit of skepticism, and even downright cynicism...no surprise to you, I'm sure.

Top management of our companies also "hopes to see lots of good come of" the 1994 version of the employee opinion survey. But...it isn't up to them alone, nor is it a function of all the detailed numbers, charts and graphs in the world. It is up to *you!*

Your role in the process

We discussed your role in the survey process earlier. To review, your responsibilities are:

- To work with the survey data to understand it
- To conduct the survey feedback meeting(s) in your unit, where you must:
  - Provide a balanced picture of the results
  - Listen!
  - Help the group plan and/or recommend appropriate actions
- Communicate upward the results of the feedback meeting(s)
- Coordinate the tracking of action recommendations made by your unit

Let's discuss each of these responsibilities in more detail . . .

Using Employee Survey Data

Maintaining confidentiality is essential

An employee opinion survey naturally brings about a certain degree of apprehension on the part of everyone in an organization. Employees are often afraid to be candid; they're afraid that honesty will get them into trouble with management. Supervisors and managers can be even more anxious: afraid to be honest with *their* managers, and fearful that the survey results will reflect upon them personally.

These fears and concerns are real! The reluctance of employees, supervisors, and managers to communicate effectively is one of the most important reasons that organizations do not operate as smoothly and productively as they might. The employee opinion survey is designed to help open the lines of communication and reinforce employee involvement. To achieve this, it is *absolutely essential that the anonymity of individual participants be maintained.*

As you know, the survey was administered in such a way that a specific questionnaire cannot be linked to a particular employee. However, not only must the survey be confidential in fact, but in perception: employees must believe it's indeed the case. In your use of the survey results, you must always recognize that the important question is not "who said this?" but "is this a problem?" and "how can we solve the problem?" Make certain that the importance of anonymity is also clearly understood by any managers or supervisors reporting to you. If you, or they, begin asking "who said this?", the opportunity for constructive problem-solving will be lost, and relationships between individuals are likely to be negatively affected.

Reacting constructively to the results

In the experience of most organizations, survey results which are provided only to top management have very little impact, even when executives review the reports conscientiously and attempt to make good use of the data.

Imagine the perspective of surveyed employees who are not provided with an opportunity to review and discuss the results. In the absence of factual information, rumors and gossip will flow: "Gee, if they won't tell us about the results of the survey, they must really be negative!" Or, "Gosh—Joe

Smith got transferred to another department. His employees must really have nailed him on the survey!"

In other words: without feedback, employees will believe that nothing has been done to address the issues that were uncovered—or worse, will misinterpret many other unrelated actions as somehow resulting from the assumed negative results.

Now, effective and conscientious managers (like yourself) are generally action-oriented. They don't skip the feedback process with bad intentions! They, do, however, have a tendency to look at the survey results and immediately plan actions to respond to employee concerns. *Do not do this!*

As we discussed above, the survey results, presented in statistical feedback reports, tell you only the "what" of the situation. They do not, however, tell you the "why" or the "how" that you need in order to effectively make improvements. That is, the report cannot reveal many important details underlying employee concerns, nor can it clearly describe what employees think can or should be done to address problems that exist.

Experience and research have clearly shown that the most effective survey programs are those in which employees at all levels of the organization receive feedback about the results, have an opportunity to review and discuss the findings, and actively participate in the process of bringing about useful changes. Among the important questions to address are:

- What are the key sources of employee motivation, satisfaction and dissatisfaction?
- What can be done to maintain those facets of the job with which employees are satisfied, while reducing areas of dissatisfaction?
- Which policies and procedures appear to be having a positive effect, and which ones are having negative impact upon employees?
- What aspects of the organization need to be better communicated to employees? Do employees need to better understand why certain things are done (and why others are not)?
- *What roadblocks exist to more effective performance? How can we remove them?*

Many managers make a mistake when discussing survey results and action plans with their employees by attempting to address each and every possible concern raised by the survey.

This doesn't work, and, moreover, employees do *not* in fact expect this. What they *do* expect is for management to provide them with a balanced picture of the survey results, and for action to be taken on a few key areas of concern which are under management's control.

Common mistakes

Employee survey results are different than those contained in reports with which management is most familiar—expenditures, forecasts, production statistics, and the like. They are not "hard" data, but rather the opinions, perceptions, feelings, and observations of *people*. They are affected by a great many factors, some not necessarily so obvious at first glance.

Some of the questions in the employee opinion survey ask employees about sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction—*feelings* about their jobs and about the company in general. Other aspects deal with *opinions* about policies and procedures. Still other questions describe employee *perceptions* of organizational efficiency and effectiveness. In dealing with data of this nature, there are a number of key mistakes to be avoided.

Oversimplification

As we've talked about earlier, drawing premature conclusions—and taking premature action—is common. If, however, you want to determine cause and effect relationships, it is almost always necessary to obtain more information about a topic than is contained in the results report. Employee perceptions and feelings can be quite complex. You've got to be able to see the "forest" as well as the "trees." Things are rarely as simple as they seem.

Suppose, for example, that an organization conducts an opinion survey and finds that a large percentage of employees are dissatisfied with promotional opportunities. In response, the organization takes action to increase these opportunities, and a number of individuals are promoted. When employees are surveyed again later, satisfaction with promotions will obviously have increased, right?

No—not necessarily. Increased promotional opportunities might actually *decrease* expressed employee satisfaction with promotions. This is not to suggest that the employee survey results are somehow wrong—in fact, they are quite valid. It is necessary to better understand how and why employees are dissatisfied with promotional opportunities before acting. It might be that employees are dissatisfied with the *manner* in which promotional decisions are made, not the *number* of promotions made. Increased promotions made using a distrusted method will probably increase dissatisfaction with promotions (at least among those who were not promoted!). And, in case you were wondering, this is not a hypothetical example—it actually happened.

Since no set of survey questions can address all aspects of an issue, it is up to you to do the appropriate "information search" during the feedback process.

Overreacting emotionally

A second common problem, particularly among very conscientious managers, is to overreact to the data—to be shocked, dismayed, or disheartened at the responses of employees to many of the survey questions. If you find yourself reacting this way, it's quite okay! It means that you are concerned about employee feelings and opinions—as all truly effective managers must be.

Keep in mind, however, that it is completely unrealistic to expect *all* employees to view *all* aspects of their work life positively. People are very different—some are more generally optimistic, some pessimistic. Also, there's always room for improvement, and standards change over time. The better we do, the more we come to expect of ourselves as an organization!

As a reminder, it is when you find yourself feeling these emotional reactions that you must be vigilant against the "who said this" reaction noted earlier. Remember to maintain your perspective!

Undervaluing the results: emotional distancing

An opposite mistake is also seen. Sometimes, it is very difficult to avoid becoming defensive about the survey results—especially when they surprise you by being less favorable than you expected. Rather than overreacting as discussed above, some people simply dismiss the results as invalid. From folks like these, you'll hear statements like:

> "The employees have it all wrong,"
>
> "Employees are always dissatisfied," or
>
> "There's nothing we can do about it, anyway."

These reactions are often rooted in frustration. It is difficult, especially for those who have never participated in a survey process of this nature, to know how to use employee feedback in a constructive way. It's also hard not to take things personally, especially when you know you're doing you're best within the constraints that *you* face!

If you find yourself feeling this way, take a deep breath and a step backwards for perspective. Remember, the employee survey process is actually very simple at the core: communicating with employees about the work situation in order to bring about improvements. It's probably something you do quite often. The only difference is the survey *data,* which are used as a *springboard for discussion,* not as a tool to evaluate you or other managers.

Also, it might be useful to keep a simple fact in mind: *There are no such things as "bad" survey results!*

Why do we say that? Simple. The opinions and feelings that employees have expressed are real, and they have real consequences. *They exist, whether or not a survey assesses them*. The survey didn't create the attitudes—positive *or* negative.

Possessing knowledge, even about "negatives," is always better than remaining unaware until it is too late for constructive action. With the survey results in hand, you have a more objective reading of the situation, and can clearly focus your discussions of potential improvements.

Or...you *could* keep your head in the sand...but that doesn't make problems go away!

Overdependence on comparisons

A related problem sometimes seen is the tendency, particularly when the survey results are less "positive" than might have been expected, to dismiss them by comparison with national or industry norms. This is demonstrated by comments such as "Well, only 50% of our employees are satisfied with their jobs. But we're doing OK, since the figure is 60% nationally."

While it is true that comparison of results with those for some normative group can be somewhat useful for some purposes, such comparisons are at best only a minor and secondary issue.

First of all, we're an industry pacesetter. We worry about, and measure ourselves against, where we need to be in the future, not about where others are today. We're a leader, not a follower.

Second, it is difficult to find useful normative data. Employees in other organizations do different jobs, face different work situations, and have different backgrounds, needs, and interests. Also, many companies do not conduct surveys; of those that do, very few make their results available for inclusion in a normative database. This makes it very difficult to draw any meaningful comparison of survey results. You simply don't know who you're comparing yourself against.

Finally, our survey questionnaire is custom-designed to address our issues, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to find appropriate comparison data.

Working with the Survey Results Report

For this year's survey, we've attempted to create reports that would be easy to understand and use, yet complete in their presentation of the data (as well as being able to be produced efficiently). There are two main types of survey results reports: the *unit* report and the *department* report. These differ slightly in their format; we'll focus on the unit (i.e., sub-department) report below, with differences in the reports produced for entire departments discussed as appropriate. Each report contains three major sections. Let's look at each of them in turn.

Part 1: The Changing Gears Index

The first things people generally ask about the results of an employee survey is: "how do they look?" or "are they positive?". The initial section of the survey feedback report attempts to address these questions.

As I'm sure you are aware, one of our major current efforts is that of educating everyone in the company about the changes in corporate culture necessary for effectively competing in a changing business and social environment. This program, called *Changing Gears,* identifies 6 major "gears in the machinery" of change:

Innovation	Questioning and examining the things we do and the way we do them. Improving old methods, reducing waste, and creating new ways that enhance the quality of our work.
Teamwork	Working effectively with each other to accomplish organizational roles. Respecting our differences and finding strength in the diversity of our backgrounds, talents, and approaches to excellence. Acting with respect for the contributions and needs of others.
Work Roles	Recognizing that all of our roles have changed to accommodate the need for a highly committed, multi-skilled work force capable of moving rapidly to where the work is, and taking responsibility for doing whatever it takes to meet the Customers' needs.
Empowerment	Management providing the support, tools, and training, and employees taking responsibility for making decisions on day-to-day activities, focusing on Customers and organizational goals.
Rewards	Providing meaningful recognition and rewards for those behaviors that are essential to our success as individuals, as a team, as a department, and as a Company.
Communications	Recognizing communications as the fiber that weaves the other elements into success, and examining, understanding, improving and using our communication channels to operate effectively and to remove barriers.

Figure 3. The six "changing gears."

These issues are precisely what the survey is attempting to provide information about! In order to provide an "at a glance" look at how well we're doing at creating and nurturing such a culture, 20 items from the survey that directly address these six "gears" have been combined into a single measure: the *Changing Gears Index* or CGI.

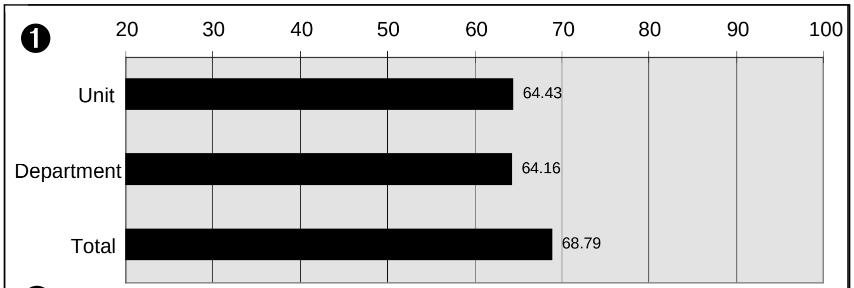
Specifically, the unit's average scores on each of the 20 items are summed to create the CGI score. Since all 20 items are scored on a scale from 1 (least favorable) to 5 (most favorable)[1], CGI scores can range from 20 to 100. Units or departments that are successfully adapting to the key changes within our company would receive a score above 60 (the higher the better, of course), while areas not adapting so well would receive scores below 60.

Figure 4 on page 18 provides a sample of the first section of the unit results report. The graph ① shows the CGI for the unit, as well as for the entire company and the total corporation. You can easily see how positive your survey results are in general, as well as how they "stack up" to those of others across the company.

Below the graph, the mean scores on each of the survey items comprising the CGI are presented ②, in order to help you understand how your unit achieved its score.

Section 1 of the department report is essentially the same, except that results are presented only for the department and for the total corporation.

[1] Note: because of the way in which they're worded, a few items had to be reverse-scored before inclusion into the index, so that higher scores would in fact represent more favorable responses.



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Item	Average Score Unit	Dept	Total
2 Functions/depts work together effectively	3.24	3.21	3.36
22 Satisfaction with: Pay	3.50	3.38	3.34
26 Satisfaction with: Training & development opportunities	2.76	2.93	3.39
29 Satisfaction with: Respect & fair treatment	3.04	3.07	3.36
34 Satisfaction with: Skill variety	3.54	3.58	3.81
35 Sense of accomplishment from doing good job	4.36	4.33	4.40
38 Chance to learn new skills & develop new talents.	3.42	3.38	3.56
39 Have authority to make work decisions	3.47	3.45	3.68
45 Potential productivity increase	2.94	2.99	3.20
50 My supervisor/manager: Listens to what I have to say.	3.65	3.60	3.78
53 My supervisor/manager: Expresses optimism and enthusiasm for new ideas	3.59	3.50	3.65
56 My supervisor/manager: Encourages me to work with my peers as a team	3.87	3.87	4.03
57 My supervisor/manager: Encourages me to take risks	2.78	2.78	2.99
59 My supervisor/manager: Empowers me—gives me control over my own work	3.50	3.55	3.80
60 My supervisor/manager: Encourages suggestions for improvement from me	3.59	3.55	3.73
61 My supervisor/manager: Finds ways to recognize people for outstanding perf	2.90	2.90	3.22
65 My supervisor/manager: Provides me with frequent and useful perf feedback	3.01	2.96	3.21
85 Top mgt is well informed about our feelings	2.21	2.16	2.46
87 Top mgt provides enough info to all	2.68	2.60	2.94
117 Changes make me feel excited about future	2.37	2.36	2.89
Changing Gears Index	**64.43**	**64.16**	**68.79**

Figure 4. Unit report example: Section 1.

Part 2: Results by cluster

The second section of the results report provides a little more detail, graphically presenting results for a number of logical clusters of items (e.g., satisfaction with various facets of the work situation). These graphs can again be useful in quickly obtaining an overall reading of the survey responses for your unit. Figure 5 below shows an example of one of these graphs.

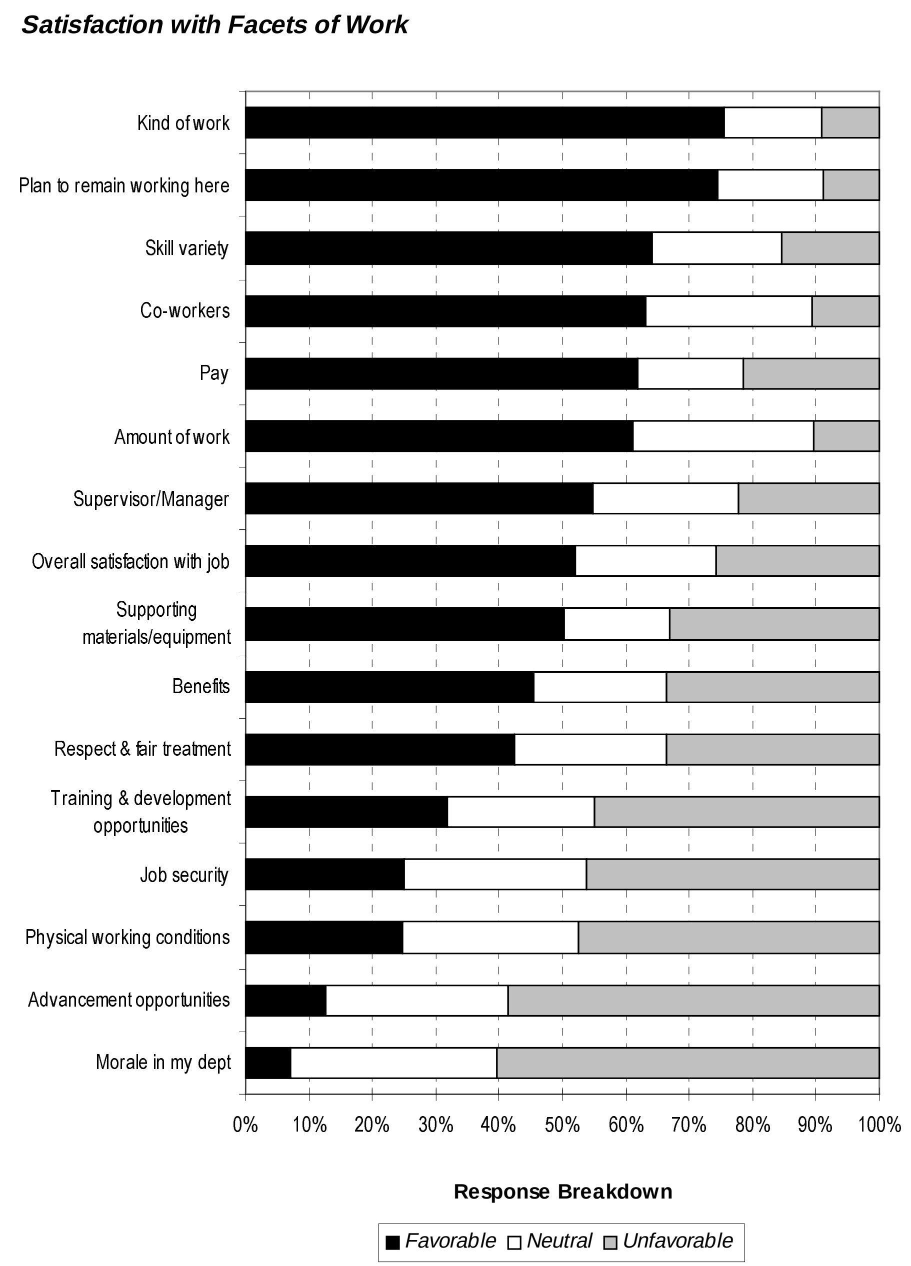

Figure 5. Unit report example: Section 2.

The "percentage favorable"

Examining this figure, you'll note that item responses are broken down into three categories: favorable, neutral, and unfavorable. This is done simply to make the survey data easier to work with. In fact, we often use only one of these categories when looking at survey item results: the *percentage favorable.*

In our questionnaire format, most items have five response options (e.g., very satisfied to very dissatisfied, or strongly agree to strongly disagree). In working with the data, it is often quite useful to collapse these into three groups: The two positive response options are called *favorable*, the middle option is called *neutral*, and the two negative categories are called *unfavorable.* Percentages for each of the two top and bottom response options are simply summed to obtain the percentages of favorable and unfavorable responses. Dealing with these "collapsed" percentages makes it easier to focus on the overall pattern of the results.

How high is up?

As noted above, this report does not contain data from other companies for comparison purposes. Without such a standard for comparison, how do you know what is a "good" result?

The simplest answer is to use your own judgment—what do *you* believe is a positive result? It's realized, however, that this isn't a very satisfying answer! To assist you in making these judgments, we can provide some "rules of thumb,", based on experience with a wide variety of organizations and types of survey questions. Note that these rules of thumb, presented in Figure 6 below, focus on interpretation of the percentage favorable (i.e., the solid black bars shown in the graphics you saw earlier in Figure 5).

70% or higher	➠	**Very good; a strength**
60% to 69%	➠	Good, positive
50% to 59%	➠	Okay
30% to 49%	➠	Room for improvement
Below 30%	➠	**Low; a cause for concern**

Figure 6. Interpreting the percentage favorable.

These guidelines can be reduced to a simple rule, corresponding to the bolded rows in the figure: According to this "70/30" rule, clearly positive items are those for which 70% or more of the employees respond favorably; they are strengths of your unit or department. Items where less than 30% of the employees respond favorably, on the other hand, are clear causes for concern.

This simple rule of thumb can be quite useful in scanning the survey report to spot key items.

Part 3: Complete item results

The final section of the survey results report provides the most information. For each and every item on the survey, detailed results are presented. A sample item from this section appears below as Figure 7.

1. Tampa Electric is an effectively managed, well-run organization.	Unit		Department		Total Company	
	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct
Strongly agree	85	53.8%	94	12.9%	544	19.6%
Agree	40	25.3%	362	49.7%	1489	53.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	21	13.3%	128	17.6%	391	14.1%
Disagree	12	7.6%	99	13.6%	258	9.3%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%	46	6.3%	87	3.1%
Total	*158*		*729*		*2769*	
Percentage Favorable:	⬆	79.1%	⬆	62.6%		73.4%

Figure 7. Unit report example: Section 3.

In this section of the report, each survey question is presented, just as it appears on the questionnaire ①. Underneath the question, each response option is shown ②, along with a bar ③ proportional in length to the number of employees choosing that option within the work unit. To the right, a table presents the number and percentage of employees choosing each response option—for the work unit ④, the entire department ⑤, and the total company ⑥. At the bottom of the table, the percentages favorable for the unit, department, and company are presented.[2]

Note that all percentages in the table are calculated using only those employees who answered that particular item; this total will generally vary somewhat across items, because some employees will leave a given item blank. Also note that, due to rounding, the percentages for some questions will not add up to precisely 100.

To assist you in quickly spotting items that are especially positive or negative, graphic "flags" are printed where appropriate. At the bottom of the unit column, to the left of the percentage favorable ⑦, the "70/30" rule discussed above is used: an up-arrow is presented for items where the percentage favorable is 70 or higher, while a down-arrow is printed for items where the value is 30 or below.

The next two columns assist you in comparing your results to those of the total department and total company. In the department column, an up or down arrow is printed for items where your unit result is 10% or more above or below the department result ⑧. Likewise, items where the unit percentage favorable is at least 10% above or below the total company are flagged in the total company column ⑨. This 10% rule of thumb is

[2] The percentage favorable is only presented for items where it is appropriate; the response options for some items do not lend themselves to categorization as "favorable" or "unfavorable."

employed to help avoid overinterpreting small variations, due simply to random chance, as significant differences.

In the department reports, a similar format is used, showing only the department and the total company results; items are again flagged using the "70/30" rule for the department percentage favorable and the "10% difference" rule for comparisons with the total company results. For those departments where 1990 survey results are available, they are presented for each common item (i.e., each item that appears on both the 1990 and 1994 questionnaires). Items that are at least ten percentage points above or below 1990 results are flagged with an up- or down-arrow.

Developing your understanding of the results

Before meeting with your employees to discuss the survey results, it is important that you work with the information provided in this report. Your goal is to identify the key strengths of your organization as well as the major areas requiring clarification and possible action.

In Part 2 of the survey report, the questionnaire items have been clustered into a number of topical categories. However, this is not by any means the only way in which the items could be grouped. You are encouraged to group them in any way that makes sense to you. Possible ways in which you might combine items are:

- By *content:* you may wish to combine items by content or issue themes. Some of this has already been done for you on a broad level in Part 2 of the survey report; however, you may wish to form new content or issue categories that are more specific and/or that make more sense to you.
- By *favorableness:* Based on the percentage favorable, you may want to combine items to separate out those that are clear *strengths* for your unit or department, those that are *concerns,* and, perhaps, those where employee responses are *mixed*.
- By *scope:* In helping to plan actions, it is important to break down issues in terms of whether they are *local* (unit) issues, issues requiring action at the level of the entire *department,* or issues that require *corporate* action or resolution. That is, which areas can you directly change yourself, and for which can you only make recommendations for change?

These types of categories are not mutually exclusive, of course, and a single item might show up in a number of areas. Plan on taking some time to "play" with the survey results so that you can come up with a good understanding of the story that they tell about your unit or department.

To help you in doing this, you've been provided with some blank "Survey Results Worksheet" forms. Figure 8 shows an example of how one manager filled in a portion of one of these worksheets.

To use the worksheet:

1. Note the name of the category ① and the item numbers contained in the category ②.
2. For each item, note the percentage favorable ③.
3. Using the criteria for interpreting the percentage favorable listed earlier, note whether the item is positive ("high") or a cause for concern ("low") by placing the appropriate letter (H/L) in the *absolute* column ④ (remember, these items are flagged for you on the survey report). You may also want to place an "M" in this column for items that are "mixed;" i.e., those which have a significant percentage of both favorable and unfavorable responses—you'd want to find out why employees are so polarized about these issues. Leave this column blank for items not falling into one of the three categories.
4. In the *relative* column ⑤, place an "H" or "L" for those items which are significantly (i.e., 10%) higher or lower than the relevant comparison group (i.e., the total department or company). You may want to use your own coding system if you're using more than one comparison group. For example, H_D might be used for items that are higher than the total department, and H_C for those higher than the total company (using this scheme, some items could of course have multiple entries in this column).
5. Note any comments you may have about the item results in the space provided ⑥. These might include your initial reactions to the results as well as questions you would like to ask your employees to clarify the results.
6. Repeat steps 1-5 for each of the categories you have identified.

TECO ENERGY, INC. *1994 Employee Opinion Survey Results Worksheet*

	Category	❷ Item #	❸ % Fav	H/L (Abs)	H/L (Rel)	Comments ❻
❶	Overall Sat and Morale	1	64	❹	❺	Employees generally believe that company is well run...could be higher, though.
		5	67			Rates OK as a place to work
		6	64		L	Lower than rest of company in rating TEC as a place to work...why?
		35	92	H		Ee's get a great sense of accomplishment from a job well-done!!
		46	7	L		Morale rated VERY low...need to explore this further during the feedback meeting.
		49	73	H		People are happy with the contribution they're making to the company.
		119	52		L	Overall satisfaction could be higher...how does this relate to morale?

4/94

Figure 8. Sample survey results worksheet

To summarize, in working with the survey results, you should first scan through the report, making notes to yourself (perhaps on the report itself), and asking yourself the following questions:

- Are the results, in general, positive, low, or somewhere in the middle?
- Are there common themes or issues among the items that are rated most favorably? Among those rated least favorably?
- Which of these key issues can be handled at the local level?
- What do I need to find out during the feedback meetings, in order to fully understand the results?

Once you have worked with the data at some length, and have answered these questions, you're ready to plan for your feedback meeting.

The Survey Feedback Meeting

The keys to conducting an effective survey feedback session are basically the same as those for any meeting that you conduct. In other words, you must:

- Plan an agenda, and follow it
- Prepare materials that you want to use and distribute during the meeting
- Involve all participants in the discussion
- Take notes on key points
- Follow up on key issues

Let's talk about these points in a bit more detail.

Preparing for the feedback session

The most important thing that you must do to prepare for your feedback session was discussed above: you must work with the survey data in order to come to your own personal understanding of the results. There's simply no substitute!

Once you've done that, you can prepare the materials that you want to present to the group. Your goal is to provide a balanced picture of the survey results, *not* to simply present results item-by-item. By working with the data in the results report, you should have a clear idea about issues and trends in your unit or department.

How many meetings?

Especially in departments that decided to use relatively broad groupings for feedback purposes, or that chose to use no sub-unit breakdowns at all, you will need to plan on conducting multiple feedback sessions.

A survey feedback session is a *two-way* communications process; it isn't just you presenting the results. If there are too many participants, not everyone can get involved and the meeting won't be effective. How many is too many? Well, once you get beyond 20 or so people, it becomes difficult. So, plan an appropriate number of meetings if there are a large number of employees in your unit.

How long should each meeting be? This depends upon a number of factors, such as the type of people within the unit and the general tone of the survey results. About 90 minutes to 2 hours generally works well. If time allows, this can form part of the agenda for regularly scheduled staff meetings; if not, a separate meeting should be scheduled for feedback. Whichever way you do it, it is important that you allow sufficient time for the meeting. View it as an opportunity for problem solving, not a distasteful chore to get over with as quickly as possible!

Planning a successful agenda

In your survey feedback meeting, it is your responsibility to:

- Provide a *balanced* picture of the survey results; share the results openly
- Motivate the active participation of all employees
- Clarify issues and concerns
- Help the group in planning appropriate actions

Experience has proven the effectiveness of a particular type of agenda in helping you to so this. There is a certain "flow" or series of steps that you should employ:

1. *Introduction*. Here, you want to set the proper tone for the meeting. State the objectives for the meeting (e.g., review and constructive problem-solving), what your role will be, and what you're expecting from the other participants.
2. *Lead topic.* To help in setting the tone for the meeting, always start off with a positive topic! Find an area where your unit or department should feel proud of yourselves. Make sure that you take the time to talk about these positive issues...once you've gotten people involved early in the discussion, they'll be less likely to "clam up" on you later, when you're discussing more sensitive or controversial issues.
3. *Easy topics.* After starting out with the "celebration" of a positive topic, you should move into other "low-risk" topics—other positive areas, or issues that are clearly non-controversial, with easy solutions. Again, your goal here is to get people involved in the discussion.
4. *Mixed results issues.* Once you've gotten everyone involved in the meeting, you can start focusing on other topics or issues. If you have any issues where people are polarized (i.e., significant percentages both favorable and unfavorable), this is a good time to address them. Your goal here is to find out why people hold such

varying opinions. At this point in the meeting, you may want to discuss any important issues where people responded in a "middle-of-the-road" fashion, as well.

5. *Key issues.* In the previous steps, you have—hopefully—created an atmosphere of open and candid communication, with participation clearly expected and valued from everyone. Now you're ready to address the key issues: those areas which are main concerns. Here, it is your job to probe for understanding of the issues, and to listen carefully. If you remember the *Key Principles* that you learned about in the Interaction Management program, you'll find them quite relevant here:

   - Maintain or enhance self-esteem
   - Listen and respond with empathy
   - Ask for help in solving the problem
   - Control the situation in a non-defensive manner
   - Accomplish the objective of the discussion

   Remember some advice given earlier...you don't have to focus on every single "negative" opinion or attitude expressed in the survey results. What issues should you focus on? There's no magic formula, but here are the key factors to consider:

   - *Degree.* Clearly, all other things being equal, issues where employees hold the *most* negative opinions or attitudes should be addressed.

   - *Importance.* Look for issues with "leverage;" those that make a difference. It's often useful to take an outward focus here: ask yourself, for instance, "would I care about this if I were a Customer?" (of course, this holds for internal as well as external Customers). That is, focus discussion and action-planning on those issues that are clearly constraints to exceptional performance and service.

   - *Feasibility/control.* Again, it's always best to focus on issues that you can solve, rather than those far beyond your control.. Be realistic, avoiding the "Don Quixote phenomenon" (tilting at windmills). This isn't to say, however, that when issues beyond your control are clearly impacting performance and service levels, you should ignore them. Obviously you need to discuss these and make recommendations for action to the appropriate parties.

6. *Conclusion.* Just as you kicked the meeting off with a positive, it's important that you close that way. Make sure, as well, that you summarize the major issues that were discussed, and recap any commitments that were made to or by the group. Set a date for

follow-up meetings, if any are required, and thank the group for their time and their candid participation.

One last point about your agenda. Once you've developed your list of issues to be covered, make an estimate of the time that you plan to spend on each one. These time estimates should total a bit less than the time you've allotted for your meeting, to allow for unanticipated issues that will undoubtedly arise. Based on these time estimates, you may want to change either your meeting length or the amount of time that you plan to spend on some of the topics.

Preparing useful visuals

Once you've outlined your meeting agenda, you'll want to get ready to execute it. One of your first tasks is that of preparing your charts and graphs for presentation to the group. These must be tailored to your specific agenda—*not* a bunch of photocopies of pages from the results report.

There are many methods by which you might prepare visuals for use in your meeting; computer graphics software (e.g., Harvard Graphics or Lotus Freelance) can do a nice job, if you—or someone you work with—has the time and skill necessary to use it. If you haven't the time or inclination, however, you have been provided with some blank forms with which you can prepare overhead transparencies for use in your meeting.

Figure 9 on page 29 provides an example of a completed form, with items corresponding to those shown earlier in the sample worksheet (Figure 8 on page 24). Once you have decided what topics/issues you want to present to the group, the way to use these forms is to:

1. On a blank *paper* copy of the form, fill in the top portion of the form in ink (or type it, if you wish). Also, fill in the item numbers and names that you have included in the topic.
2. Copy this partially completed form onto *transparency film.*
3. Using colored transparency pens, fill in bars of the appropriate length for each item, corresponding to the item percentages favorable. Make sure that you remain consistent in your use of color-coding of unit, department, and company results across all items.
4. Repeat steps 1 to 3 for each topic or issue that you'll be discussing during the meeting.

At any rate, whatever method you use to prepare your visuals, make sure that:

- Each presents only a single topic
- They're kept "clean," presenting only the minimum detail level necessary to effectively provide the message
- They are clearly readable throughout the room.

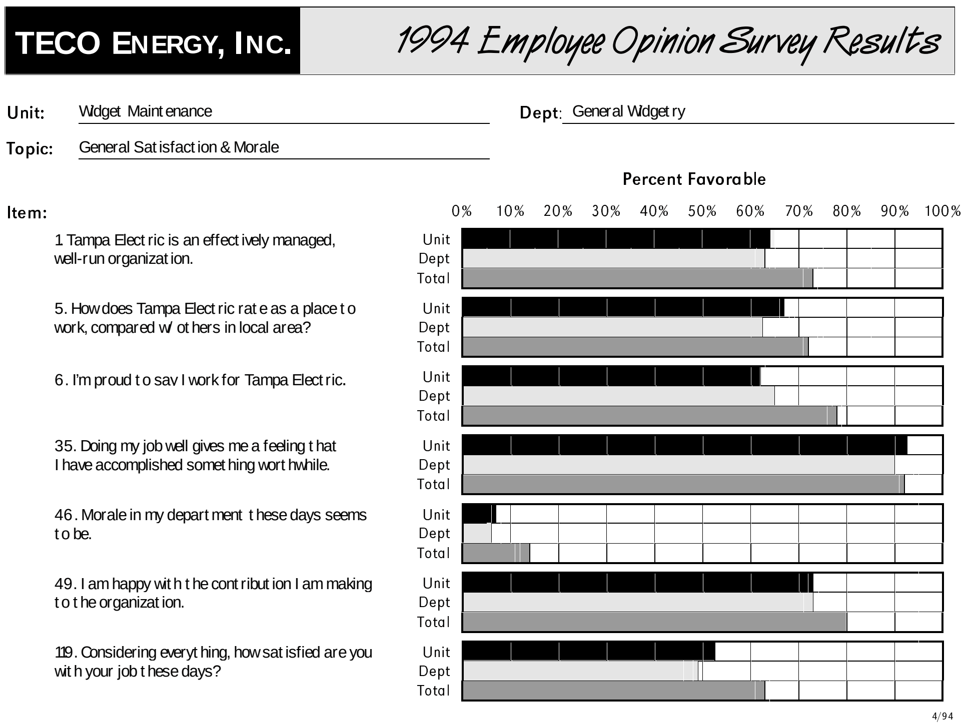

Figure 9. Sample survey results overhead.

Sweating the details

Sometimes, we worry so much about the big picture, that it's easy to overlook some of the little things that, while not guaranteeing success if handled properly, can easily sidetrack a meeting if not taken care of. In that light, before the meeting, make sure that:

- ❒ All employees have received notice of the meeting date, time, and place...and purpose!
- ❒ You've reserved the meeting room for the appropriate length of time.

- ❒ A flip-chart with markers is available in the meeting room (a white or blackboard will do in a pinch...but you can't take it with you when the meeting is over!).
- ❒ Your overhead projector is working...you might also want to have a spare lamp on hand for it.
- ❒ You have a copy of the survey results report for reference.
- ❒ You have sufficient copies of survey Meeting Summary and Action Tracking forms (to be explained below).
- ❒ Pens and paper are available for note-taking.
- ❒ Your visuals are numbered in sequence. (Hint: if you place the transparencies in cardboard frames, you can use the frame as an area to write reminder notes to yourself.).
- ❒ Transparency pens are available, if you'll be marking up your overheads.
- ❒ You have a pointer, to help in directing attention to key areas of your visuals. (A pen will do in a pinch.)

Conducting the feedback meeting

Okay...so here you are! The room is set up just right, all the details have been taken care of, you've got a set of perfect visuals, and you're agenda is carefully planned. You're ready to go. Well, you might be a little bit apprehensive—this isn't something you do every day, after all. You look around the room, and you see the mix of people that are there. You know that you've got a mix of optimists, pessimists, and some "in-betweens." It's time to begin the meeting. Let's consider some factors that can help you carry this off successfully.

Setting the ground rules

The first part of your agenda is a discussion of the expectations for the meeting. It is important that you set a positive tone here! Examples of some points that you might want to cover are:

- "We're here to review the results of the employee opinion survey for our group. I've spent some time reviewing the results, and I can tell you that there are some very positive areas, but also some where I know we can do better. What I'll be doing with you today is:
  - Reviewing some of the key issues from the survey with you. I want to get your reactions to them. Do they ring true?

    - Asking for clarification on issues that I don't understand. No survey can fully cover every important issue in full detail. If we're going to address issues, we first need to be sure that we understand them.

    - Asking for your input on actions that we can take so that we can do better in key areas."

- "This is a *meeting,* not a presentation! If we're going to get the most out of it, I need each of you to participate. I want you to provide:

    - *Real* information, not "politically correct" answers. Tell me what I *need* to hear, not what you think I want to hear.

    - Specifics, not generalities."

- "I'll be taking notes on the flip chart as we go along. However, I'd also like someone else to volunteer to be the "recorder" for our meeting, taking notes on what we discuss in case I miss anything."

- "We're here to look at the whole picture. We're not going to talk only about our strong points...but neither are we here just to have a gripe session. We're here to talk about how we can do better!"

- "Any questions?"

Presenting issues

Your agenda is structured so that you move from the positive issues into the more sensitive areas, setting a positive tone and getting people to participate early. Your approach to the entire meeting must be *balanced*.

In this regard, two types of mistakes are seen. Some managers try to concentrate almost entirely on the positive survey results, glossing over the areas of concern. Others become so focused on the possibilities for resolving problems that they tend to minimize presentation and discussion of the positive results. Try to avoid these two extremes, by "celebrating" the positive results and focusing on *improvement* with regard to the other areas—while not allowing a descent into an "ain't it awful" type of wallowing in problems.

Introduce each issue to be discussed by presenting your chart. Do not, however, simply rattle off the numbers or percentages of employees—if you've prepared your visuals properly, people can easily *see* these. You want to describe the issue, and discuss reasons and trends. It's often useful to offer your own personal "take" on the issue, before asking for clarification and reactions. Avoid lecturing and rationalizing as you do this, though.

Leadership of the meeting

The employee feedback meeting is, at its core, an opportunity for you to use your leadership skills. An effective leader keeps meetings on course, presents information or arguments effectively, makes certain that all voices are heard and understood, and develops teamwork and cooperation. Let's examine some things that can help you accomplish this.

Anticipating questions and comments. In a survey feedback meeting, emotions can sometimes run high—both yours and those of the other participants. One extremely useful technique to help avoid problem situations is that of anticipating the types of questions and comments you're going to get. Once you've planned the issues that you'll be discussing, you should jot down, for each of them, a few of the questions or comments that you anticipate. This really isn't that hard to do...after all, you know all of the meeting participants quite well. Practice how you'll handle some of the especially difficult comments and questions that arise.

Handling surprises. No matter how well you've planned, however, don't be surprised if you get one or more questions from way out in "left field." You may also have a confirmed—and vocal—cynic in your group, who'll use the feedback meeting as an opportunity to test you in some way, perhaps by denigrating the entire survey effort. When you get one of these unpleasant "surprises," use the following tips to deal with it effectively.

- Wait a moment before you respond. It's natural to have an emotional reaction when hit with a surprise...so "look before you leap."
- Use restatement. To make sure that you understand the question or comment, restate it in your own words and ask for confirmation that you understand it correctly. This can also give you an extra moment or two to gather your thoughts.
- Ask for corroboration. Involve others, and see if this is a shared feeling or concern. If it isn't, other group members may handle the issue for you!
- Don't get defensive or start rationalizing.
- Remain calm. Don't argue.
- Use humor effectively!
- Watch your body language. Non-verbals generally speak much louder than words.
- Focus on the issue, not the person.
- Ask for specifics

- Focus on group issues, not individual concerns. State that there are other forums for handling one-on-one issues, and move on.
- Don't make a promise you cannot keep, just to get the issue out of the way for now.
- Maintain the person's self-esteem. You don't want to shut him or her down, or make other participants hesitant to participate.

Involving hesitant employees. It's quite typical for one or two people in a group to dominate the discussion. It's no problem getting *them* involved in the meeting! There will be others, however, whose natural tendency is to sit back and listen, rather than share comments and concerns. Make sure that you work at involving these employees early on in the meeting, but in a non-threatening way. Ask them for their reactions to the comments of others ("Janet, do you agree?" or "John, you work with that issue, what do you think about this"). Thank each person, by name, for their contributions, in a genuine manner.

Setting the example. When you're asking others to participate openly and honestly, you'd better be sure and model these behaviors yourself! You create the meeting climate with your actions. Share some of your own personal concerns and feelings at appropriate points, and don't be afraid to poke a little fun at yourself. Demonstrate that you welcome each comment and question. Maintain your enthusiasm.

Keeping on course. Sometimes, especially when you're successfully generating a lot of participation, the meeting can drift away from the established agenda. This isn't always a bad thing—often, the survey results serve as a springboard for uncovering other key issues. You must play the key role of "gatekeeper," however: expanding discussion when necessary, and gracefully moving on to other issues at other times.

When time doesn't allow for full discussion of particular questions or concerns, it might be helpful to post these on a flipchart page, so that they can be dealt with near the end of the meeting (if time allows) or at a future time, if appropriate.

Don't get caught up in the "rapture of the deep," when discussion of one issue is going so well that, before you know it, it's time for the meeting to end—and you've only covered ten percent of your agenda!

Action Planning

What issues require action?

A very common comment heard from employees that have participated in an opinion survey is that "nothing got done" as a result. Sometimes this is in fact true; more often, it is an incorrect perception due to lack of communication.

The employee opinion survey is designed to gather information that will be both *listened to* and *acted upon.* One of the key objectives of the feedback process is to plan appropriate actions to resolve issues that are uncovered.

As we've mentioned earlier, however, this doesn't mean that every concern or issue must be dealt with; you need to be selective in focusing on a few significant issues (refer back to the discussion of criteria for selecting key issues on page 27).

Once you've decided that certain issues require action, you'll find that these fall into two types:

- Local issues: those that can be resolved within your own unit or department. You can take direct action on these issues.
- *Global* issues: those that must be dealt with at a broader level, including organization-wide policies and procedures. You can only make action *recommendations* about these.

All other things being equal, it's suggested that—while you certainly can discuss global issues in your feedback meeting—you focus action planning on local issues. It's the best way to maximize the return on the investment made into the survey process.

However, when there are organizational or inter-group issues that are clearly impacting the performance or service level of your unit, it is important to make this known to the appropriate managers and departments. If your group feels that they can contribute to a solution to the problem, you should spend time coming up with a clear and specific recommendation.

How to do it

In planning the survey feedback meeting agenda, you must make sure to allow time for action planning on key issues. The following are some time-tested recommendations to assist you in doing this effectively and efficiently:

- Define the problem clearly. Before you can resolve a problem, you must be able to define it clearly, succinctly, and specifically. Get input from the group to make sure that there is true agreement on (a) the fact that a problem exists, and (b) the specific nature and causes of the problem. Often, you have a key role to play here, by helping the group to understand why certain things are done the way they are, or why certain policies and programs exist. This process of communication and clarification may in fact solve the "problem."

- Use brainstorming to generate alternative solutions. Before you jump into a solution, gather input from everyone on potential courses of action. List them on a flip chart, *without* evaluating them at this point.

- Evaluate the alternatives. Generate a discussion on the listed alternatives, to see if consensus can be reached on a recommended solution. Your input is valuable here: you can help the group understand which alternatives are more feasible than others. But, be careful to maintain an open perspective on new possibilities...think beyond "this is the way we do things." Balance reality with possibility!

- Decide who will do what, when. List specific actions to be taken, who will take them, when they will take them, and what the feedback loop back to the group will be.

- Close the loop! Remember, sometimes, all you can do is make a recommendation. It is especially important in these cases that the specific recommendation be agreed upon, who it will be made to, and how the group will be informed of the final decision. It is this lack of closure that often leads to skepticism regarding the possibility for real action. Many times, actions are indeed taken as a direct result of the survey—but no one ever is informed!

Alternatives

Sometimes, it's not possible to accomplish all of these objectives in a single meeting. It depends upon the nature and number of key issues that arise out of the survey results and discussion.

It is entirely appropriate to use other means of planning and taking action. You can ask for volunteers, or nominate people, to serve on a task force charged with completing the above steps on a particularly important issue. Other times, you have employee teams, EI groups, or quality circles that can be assigned these tasks. Use whatever means you have at your disposal, and don't be afraid to get creative.

Documenting actions

The important thing is that actions get taken, not whether they come out of a particular meeting format! No matter how the process is handled, however, it is important that the feedback loop be closed—that the group making the recommendation be informed about the results.

It is also important that, as a company, we can document that we've obtained a return on the investment of time, money, and effort that the survey process represents.

Each officer is accountable for the effectiveness of the survey process in their department. Each is expected to do the following:

- Ensure that, as promised, each employee had a chance to participate in a survey feedback meeting.
- Communicate upward the survey results for their department: what key issues were uncovered in the feedback meetings, and what actions were taken within the department to resolve them.
- Communicate upward any recommendations for corporate-wide action that result from the feedback and action planning process.

A few forms have been created to help achieve these objectives with a minimum of wasted effort. We're not trying to create a survey bureaucracy, but there has to be a way to document results!

First of all, at the conclusion of the feedback meeting, you should complete a copy of the *Feedback Meeting Summary* form, shown in Figure 10. As you can see, this form serves to document that the meeting was held. It asks you to summarize the overall tone of the meeting, and the major issues that were discussed. It also asks for a summary of the key actions that you will take, as well as the recommendations for actions that need to be taken outside of your unit.

You should keep a copy of the completed form for your records and also send one to your immediate manager and to the survey coordinator for your department (i.e., the task force representative listed on page 4).

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Feedback Meeting Summary

Department:________________ Work Unit:________________

Meeting Date:________________ Conducted by:________________

Key issues discussed (as a guide, identify 3 or more positive and 3 or more negative issues)

Key ideas or suggestions/Actions to be taken

Overall, how did the meeting go?

What problem areas will require action outside or your unit?

Further Instructions:
- For each key issue requiring action, complete an *Action Recommendation & Tracking* form, following the instructions printed there.
- Send one copy of this form to your manager, one to your departmental survey coordinator (see list on back), and retain one for your records

Figure 10. Feedback meeting summary form.

For each of the key action issues—those that your group will be taking and those for which you're making a recommendation—you'll then complete a second form: the *Action Recommendation & Tracking* form shown in Figure 11.

On this form, you'll write a clear specification of the problem ①, and either (a) the action to be taken by you and your group, or (b) the specific recommendation for action that you've agreed upon ②.

If the form is documenting an action that you will be taking, simply send a copy of the form to your manager and to the departmental survey coordinator, also keeping one for your files.

When the planned action has been completed, place a checkmark in the box on the form ③, and again send a copy to your manager and the survey coordinator. In this way, both of them know what actions have been planned and when they have been completed.

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Action Recommendation & Tracking

Department: ____________ Work Unit: ____________

Meeting Date: ____________ Conducted by: ____________

Immediate Mgr: ____________ Survey Coordinator: ____________

Problem (indicate only one problem per form) ❶		Recommended Action/Action to be taken (who/what/when) ❷	Check (✓) this box when action has been completed ❒ ❸
Passed for further action to: ❹	Date received: / Date passed on:	Decision or further recommendation	Action to be completed by (est. date):
Passed for further action to:	Date received: / Date passed on:	Decision or further recommendation	Action to be completed by (est. date):
Passed for further action to:	Date received: / Date passed on:	Decision or further recommendation	Action to be completed by (est. date):
Passed for further action to:	Date received: / Date passed on:	Decision or further recommendation	Action to be completed by (est. date):

Instructions on reverse side!

Figure 11. Survey action tracking form.

When you're making a recommendation for action outside of your group, the process is slightly different. Typically, you should write your manager's name in the "passed on for action to" box ④ before you make and pass on the copies. In this way, recommendations for action at the department or organization level "bubble up" to the top of your department, where they can be handled or passed on to another department for resolution.

That is, the "bubbling up" process should continue until the issue is resolved, one way or the other. The person who resolves the issue should place a checkmark in the appropriate box, and then send the completed form back "down the line." This completed form should make its way back to the originating unit to "close the loop." At this point, the originating unit (i.e., you) should send a copy to the departmental survey coordinator for closure and documentation.

In brief, the rules are simple: take action on an issue if you can; if not, pass it on up the line (or sideways to the appropriate department). When the issue is resolved, the person doing so needs to send the form back to whomever passed it to him or her. Issues, then, get passed up or out for resolution, and then the resolution needs to be passed back to the originating unit to close the loop.

As in all other aspects of the survey process, however, flexibility is allowed. Your department may have modified the above "generic" procedure somewhat in order to meet your own needs effectively. For instance, some departments in 1990 actually implemented a computerized database system for tracking action issues and their resolution. You may, then, be receiving additional specific instructions from your manager or survey coordinator.

A Final Word

The Employee Opinion Survey is a communication *process,* not just a questionnaire. But it's a simple process at root, aimed at improving our company's ability to effectively compete in a changing environment. It gives us a chance to take a step back and *measure* how much we have changed, and whether we're changing in the appropriate directions. It allows us one more way of identifying barriers that are preventing us from providing excellent service to our Customers.

If the preceding material has left you with any impression, it should be that your role in the process is critical to the success of the survey. The numbers are in—now it's your task to work with them to understand what they really mean, augmented by discussions with the employees in your department. As you're doing this, your eye must always be on ways to improve performance: if problems are identified, work to solve them. If you can't solve them alone, talk to those that can!

If you have any questions or comments about the survey process, contact the survey task force member for your department (a list can be found on page 4) or the overall survey coordinator, Bill Waldron, at extension 41503 (or via OVVM to BBBJW).

Like other challenges you face as a leader, your role in the survey process isn't always going to be as easy or simple as you might like. Ultimately, however, it can be a very rewarding one. Good luck in your efforts!