

## What is Wrong with Current Employee Surveys?

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Most current organizational climate surveys, employee engagement survey, or pulse checks are missing the mark. If your organization is conducting an annual climate survey, I recommend making the most of it. This is much more than a formality, and if the survey instrument is well-designed, can produce highly valuable information. First, ask who developed the survey instrument. Were they skilled in Survey Design? To do it right, it's much more than a simple list of questions. A properly developed survey instrument considers Reliability and Validity and uses a mixed methods approach consisting of quantitative and qualitative questions.

Reliability addresses internal consistency. Essentially, this determines if the questions within the survey instrument are related, and to what extent. Typically, in the development of the survey, a sample of the population will complete the survey, then a method called Cronbach's alpha will tell you what questions are in line with the intended results and what questions should be discarded. If the correlation coefficient is less than .70, error should be expected in the results. This exercise ensures you are asking the right questions to ensure reliability, meaning the survey can be repeated within the same population with similar results if no changes were implemented. Validity ensures you are testing what you intend to test. Further, it answers the questions: Does it adequately represent the topics to be addressed? Is it comprehensive? Is it appropriate for the population?

It is also important to note that one size does not fit all. Within an organization, your goal is 100% participation, which represents the total population, represented in statistics world as  $N$ . If less than that, an adequate number of participants, representing the sample, which is represented as  $n$ , is required to achieve Statistical Significance. This number varies based on the size of  $N$  (how many total employees you have). If too few complete the survey, you may not achieve statistical significance, but value may still be found within descriptive statistics. I would; however, avoid inferential statistics without an adequate sample size. In a small organization, let's say 20 or less total people, a survey may not be the best tool. In this case, I would conduct include personal interviews and/or focus groups to identify patterns or trends.

Why are current organizational climate surveys missing the mark? Asking a series of questions across multiple areas and then determining the average, or mean, score is telling, but this is only half of the value in conducting the climate survey. Descriptive statistics provide a summary of the sample, while inferential statistics can be used to identify patterns or trends amongst different groups. For example, if a small number of demographic questions are asked up front, e.g. salary range, time in industry, time with employer, commute time, and level, without directly asking for personal identifiable information, I can then ask the routine questions included in most climate surveys without creating fear of repercussions. Additionally, you may end up grouping sub-groups if the data is more telling. For example, addressing the top half of salary range compared to responses of the bottom half of the salary range.

Once responses are consolidated and analyzed, I can identify patterns or trends of correlation. Following our example, I may find a correlation suggesting that those with a longer commute to work are generally less satisfied with the current climate. Correlation does not directly indicate the cause; however, this may influence hiring decisions in the future. After all, getting to the workplace is half the battle. Conversely, you may find that commute time has no effect of statistical significance. This implies that your employees are willing to drive a bit further to get to the workplace, which is a positive trend, and may cause consideration of a different hiring pool.

In addition to quantitative questions, at least one or two qualitative questions should be included to allow free text. These questions deserve careful consideration. Quite often, these open-ended questions highlight major trends in responses adding significant value.

An organizational climate survey is an opportunity to identify the good, the bad, and the ugly. It is not an HR problem; it is a leadership problem, and should be taken seriously. Time and time again, it's been proven that happy employees directly affect overall organizational performance. Once you've tackled your climate survey, you are prepared to address organizational culture to set up success in the near future. <<What's the difference between Climate and Culture?>> *link to site*

At Lang Research Group, we are educated, experienced, and credentialed in quantitative and qualitative objective research methods. We've leveraged several popular organizational climate surveys, ran the numbers through sample populations to ensure reliability and validity, and built a survey instrument that will provide insightful and actionable results to our clients. Contact Us @ [info@langresearch.com](mailto:info@langresearch.com) or visit our website [langresearch.com](http://langresearch.com) to see how we can help your organization with all Organizational Development challenges related to organizational climate, organizational culture, strategy, structure, and change management, and training.

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*Dr. Lang is the founder of Lang Research Group, providing professional support services in the areas of organizational climate, culture, strategy, structure, change management, and training. Lang Research Group operates nationwide out of Washington, DC, and is a proud Veteran-Owned Small Business with significant capability.*

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