2013 Army Civilian Attitude Survey

Guide to Data Analysis and Action Planning

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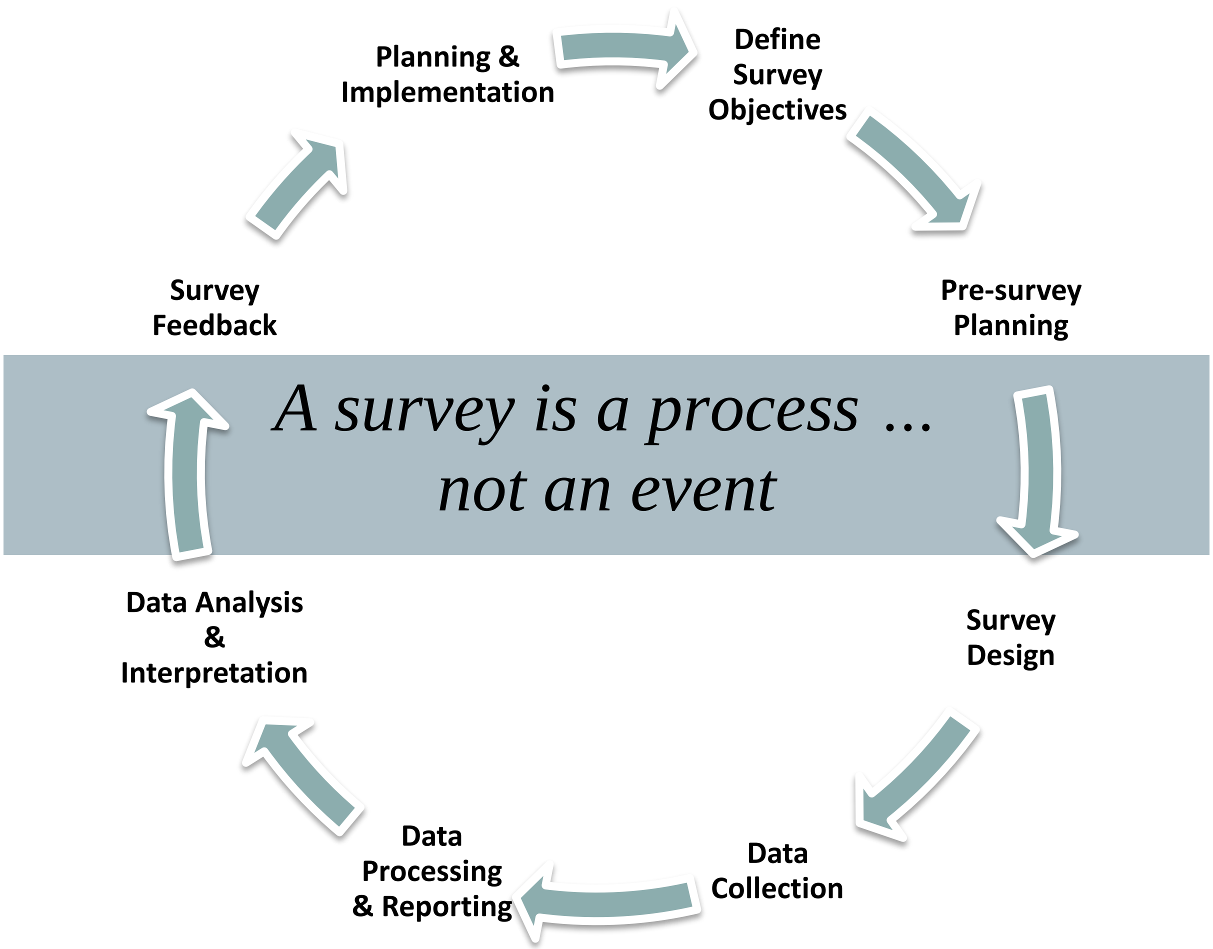
Introduction

Review of the Survey Process

A survey is a process, not an event. We depict it by a circle to illustrate that it should be on-going and continuous.



So far you have completed the first five phases of the survey process. Now come the phases of the process known as **survey follow-up** – the parts that occur AFTER data are processed.

All parts of the process are important, but these final three stages are critical. If these stages are not completed, and taken seriously, it is unlikely that any change will occur and we have essentially wasted much of the effort that went into the initial phases of the process.

This guide is meant to help you with those final three stages. It is designed to help you interpret the results in your group's data report and to guide you through the action planning process.

Background on the Survey

One of the main goals of Army is to be judged the employer of choice by its civilian supervisors and non-supervisors. For over 30 years, Army has periodically surveyed the morale of its workforce. Since 2001, Army has used a web-based version of the Army Civilian Attitude Survey which allows Army to conduct a census of its entire US-citizen, appropriated and non-appropriated fund civilian workforce.

The Army Civilian Attitude Survey was administered in 2013. There were two versions of the survey – one for non-supervisors and one for supervisors. The items on each version of the survey were grouped into composites, or topics.

Non-supervisors and supervisors responded to the majority of the statements using several 5-point rating scales. A sixth option (Don't Know/Not Applicable) was also available for most items, but is not included in the scoring. For reporting purposes, the scales were collapsed as follows:

FAVORABLE		**NEUTRAL**	**UNFAVORABLE**	
Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Neither Agree nor Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
Very Satisfied	*Satisfied*	*Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied*	*Dissatisfied*	*Very Dissatisfied*
Very Likely	*Likely*	*Neither Likely nor Unlikely*	*Unlikely*	*Very Unlikely*
Very Well Prepared	*Well Prepared*	*Neither Well nor Poorly Prepared*	*Poorly Prepared*	*Very Poorly Prepared*
Very Well	*Well*	*Adequately*	*Poorly*	*Very Poorly*

Items that were negatively worded (e.g., *If I complained of discrimination, it would be held against me*) were reverse-scored so that responses fit the above format. For items whose response scales did not fit the above Favorable/Neutral/Unfavorable format (e.g., Yes/No items), the percentage of people selecting each individual response option is reported.

Additional Support

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How to Interpret Data

There are three perspectives that can be used to interpret survey results.

» Your PERSONAL STANDARD is the <u>most important guideline</u> to use in interpreting your data. This is *not* a personal preference; it is your interpretation of the goals and priorities for your organization, e.g., your base. You know what has been occurring in your group both before and during the survey. Your understanding and expectations have merit in your analysis. They will help you determine your group's strengths and areas of opportunity.

Ask yourself: Are the responses as favorable or unfavorable as I expected? What do the results say about the success of recent group and/or organizational initiatives?

» INTERPRETIVE GUIDELINES are numeric recommendations for classifying questions into strengths and opportunities for improvement. It is essential to remember that these are not "hard-and-fast" rules for data interpretation. Always analyze your data in context. In particular, use discretion in applying numeric guidelines if your total number of respondents is small.

Here are the interpretive guidelines for the Army Civilian Attitude Survey:

STRENGTHS = For Supervisor reports, a favorable response of 55% or higher and an unfavorable response of 20% or lower. For non-supervisors, a favorable response of 50% or higher and an unfavorable response of 20% or lower.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT = For supervisors, a 30% or higher unfavorable response **OR** at least a 20% unfavorable response and less than or equal to a 50% favorable response. For non-supervisors, a 30% or higher unfavorable response **OR** at least a 20% unfavorable response and less than or equal to a 45% favorable response.

UNDECIDED = Showing a large percentage (30%+) of respondents in the neutral category

What do high neutral percentages indicate?

- Inconsistency, i.e., sometimes the issue is positive and sometimes it is negative so it "averages" out in the middle
- A belief that the issue is simply average
- Concerns about confidentiality – the middle ground is perceived as safe

DIVIDED = You have almost equal numbers of favorable and unfavorable response **OR** you have almost no neutral response

Such polarization is normal for large populations, since it reflects natural differences across employee groups. However, if you see this occurring in a smaller group, you should be concerned, since polarization affects morale, teamwork, and overall satisfaction.

MIXED = Not fitting into any other category (i.e., not "good" enough to be a strength nor "bad" enough to be an opportunity).

Mixed items are difficult to interpret because you don't get a clear indication of opinion. In many cases, you will need to get further clarification from the source of the data (non-supervisors or supervisors). Sometimes you can interpret mixed items in the context of other items in the composite, or items with similar themes. If the other items all are strongly positive, the mixed item may be interpreted as more unfavorable, and vice-versa.

» You can also evaluate your group's results by comparing them with other groups' results. These other groups may come from within your organization (supervisors vs. non-supervisors, your installation vs. MACOM) or from outside your organization (e.g., private sector external norms).

When considering these RELATIVE COMPARISONS, look for differences of at least 5-10 percentage points. Even though smaller differences may be statistically significant with larger populations, it is simply not practical to examine differences of less than five points.

And **remember that your own results come first.** Do not discount a low score simply because it is more favorable than another group's score.

Determining Priorities for Action

It has been said that a good survey raises more questions than it answers. It's important to remember that survey results tell you WHAT people said – but they don't tell you WHY they said it. Additional interpretation and input is typically needed to get to the root causes driving the survey results.

Where do you start? Following are some guidelines to use.

Satisfaction with Civilian Human Resources (CHR) Customer Service

Begin by getting together with other members of your Civilian Human Resource team (e.g., Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC), Regional Operations, or Headquarters Department of Army (HDQA) Civilian Human Resources Agency (CHRA) staff) as appropriate to discuss the results.

Step 1: Determine the issues

Your objective is to identify the primary issues facing your group. Use the guidelines on page 5 to make your determination, but don't forget to also consider your organizational and group priorities and goals. Issues will be reflected in the common themes that appear in the items. Begin by looking at the items needing improvement. What do these items have in common? Do they all relate to filling vacancies? Accessibility of information? Interpersonal relations?

Now continue on with the other results. Do you see similar themes cropping up? Are certain things consistently more favorable or unfavorable? Do you see any contradictory responses?

Step 2: Prioritize the issues

Now try to come to consensus on no more than <u>three</u> key issues that you'll want to start working on. Why three? Because experience shows that trying to tackle too many issues at one time pretty much ensures that nothing tangible will occur on any of them! [This does not mean that the other issues will be ignored. As you successfully resolve one issue, others can move up the list.]

Use the performance results (the scores from your data report) to help you. Look at your strengths – what can you leverage to help make improvements in other areas? Also look at issues with lower favorable scores. But remember to use your personal standards – your organizational and group priorities and goals – and keep the results in context. Begin by asking yourself these questions:

1. What issues, if addressed, will have the largest impact on the most people?
2. How will improving a particular issue affect other outcomes like retention or quality?
3. How important is the issue in achieving your objectives?
4. What will be the consequences if the issue is NOT addressed?

Step 3: Develop a theory about the results

Many internal and/or external events may have contributed to your results. These include:

- » Organizational changes
- » Policy changes
- » The local economy
- » Recent news events

The point of thinking about these things is not to rationalize the results, but to *understand* them. Now you begin to develop your ideas about what respondents were REALLY saying.

Use a "drill-down" process in your discussion:

1. Brainstorm as many reasons as you can as to why people responded the way they did [you will find some brainstorming guidelines on page 10].
2. For each reason, ask "Why?"
3. Continue to ask "why" until you can't come up with another answer. Sometimes this can be as many as five times.
4. Make a list of all possible causes and rate the probability of each being the true reason for, or root cause of, the issue.
5. Settle on the most likely root cause.

Step 4: Validate your root cause

Remember that survey results reflect perceptions, which differ from person to person. Your perception of the root cause may therefore be different from respondents' perceptions. It is a mistake to jump to a premature diagnosis – to assume we know what the underlying reasons for the ratings are.

You will undoubtedly need to collect more information to validate your assumptions. This can be done in many ways, the most common being focus groups or mini-surveys.

Focus groups provide you with the most direct answers. Here are some guidelines if you choose to implement focus groups.

Logistics

- » Invite those who have a vested interest in – and information about – the issue being discussed. Keep the number small – 10 to 12 is a good size for a focus group.
- » Select employees randomly. Do not "pick-and-choose" – you want to get a variety of ideas. Do not have reporting relationships in the same group.
- » Make participation voluntary. Survey participation should NOT be a requirement for participating in a focus group.

» Schedule groups during regular work time. If you have multiple shifts, try to accommodate them.
» Allow at least 1½ hours for the meeting to allow plenty of time for people to voice their opinions. It's better to end early than run overtime.
» Use a room large enough for all participants. Make sure it is closed off from distractions.
» Use an informal, circular seating arrangement instead of a "classroom- type" arrangement to facilitate discussion.
» Have a flip chart or a white/black board available for note-taking.

PROCESS:

» Present the original issue – not your assumed root cause. Validate the results ("Do people still feel the same way?"). Things may have changed since the survey.
» Ask attendees to brainstorm reasons for the results, just the way you did. This will tell you if your assumption is correct, or if you overlooked something.
» Try to learn how prevalent the issue is and how strongly people feel about it. Get input from more than one person.
» Avoid giving your own interpretation of the issue before employees have given theirs. Also, encourage the use of examples, and defer questions back to the group – you do not have to have all of the answers.
» It is not essential to have the group reach consensus – your purpose is to absorb as much information as you can get. YOU will make the final determination about the root cause of the issue.

Overall Satisfaction for Non-supervisors and Supervisors

The process for dealing with supervisor and non-supervisor results is the same as for CHRA. However, there are two additional considerations:

1. CHRA scores only dealt with results for Civilian Human Resources. The results for supervisors and non-supervisors deal with myriad topics ranging from Leadership to Training and Development to Fairness. As an individual – even as part of the Army Civilian Human Resource workforce – you will probably not be able to take action on all potential issues that arise. That's why it's very important for you to involve the management team in your location to deal with issues that are outside of your scope of authority.
2. In determining your priorities, you may want to compare the results of both supervisor and non-supervisor groups, to see if there are similarities or differences in how they view the same areas. Strong differences may indicate division that needs to be addressed.

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Upon completing these steps, you will have identified your clear priorities for action AND the root causes. In the next section, we will look at action planning around your issues.

Action Planning

Keep in mind that "people support what they help create." The best way to mobilize positive change is through the use of one or more action planning teams that each focus on one issue. You can use your original discussion team (e.g., Army Civilian Human Resource non-supervisors and supervisors for the CHRA reports, or local management for the Overall Satisfaction reports). You can also ask for assistance from one of your focus groups, or convene a new group.

Guidelines for the action-planning group are similar to those for focus groups:

» Ask for volunteers. If you can't get enough volunteers, recruit those you feel might be best qualified to deal with the issue. But be sure that everyone understands this is a voluntary commitment. Non-supervisors must be allowed to say "no" without penalty.

» Try to get representation from all groups affected by the issue.

» Keep the number small – fewer than 10 is best for group decision-making. Some prefer an uneven number of participants, so there are no "ties" in voting.

» Make sure everyone understands the time commitment. Action planning teams will often have multiple meetings, plus "assignments" that need to be done outside of the meetings.

» Hold your meetings on regular work time.

» Have a flip chart or black/white board available for note-taking.

» Allow at least 1 hour per meeting.

» **Never leave a meeting without a plan of action**. The group will feel better psychologically if there is a practical outcome from every meeting – if some action is taken or assigned – even if that action is only to schedule the next meeting.

Once you've identified the root cause, there are four remaining steps in any action planning process:

» Arrive at a solution.
» Develop an action plan.
» Implement the action plan.
» Monitor the effectiveness of the action plan.

<u>Step 1: Arrive at a Solution</u>

There are really two parts to this step.

A. Brainstorm solutions. You're probably familiar with brainstorming guidelines, but just in case, here's a quick refresher:
   » Set a time limit
   » Generate as many ideas as possible – you want QUANTITY, not quality
   » Encourage employees to build on each others' ideas
   » No idea is "too wild" to be put forth
   » No evaluation of ideas is allowed

B. Select the best solution. There are several ways to do this – here are a few:
   - » Use advocates: One individual volunteers to "argue" each solution before the rest of the group, much like an attorney would argue before a jury. However, the advocate for the solution <u>cannot</u> be the person who suggested it. An advantage of this rule is that each solution must have at least one proponent other than the originator, or it is dropped.
   - » Use pre-set criteria: Before the brainstorming session, the group decides upon a set of criteria that the optimal solution would have (e.g., ease of implementation, cost). Each solution is then evaluated against this list. Criteria can be designated as "MUST have" or "nice to have" to make final evaluations easier. Any solution not meeting all of the "MUST have" criteria is eliminated.
   - » Use pros/cons: For each solution, the group lists all of the positive aspects and all of the negative aspects. Any solution with more negatives than positives is eliminated.

Finally, the group selects – either through consensus or vote – one solution to try. [Don't discard your other solutions. You may need to retreat to "Plan B" if things don't go as planned!]

<u>Step 2: Develop an Action Plan</u>

In the action plan, you need to define:

- » WHAT specifically is to be done. This may include several actions.
- » WHO is going to IMPLEMENT each action.
- » WHO is going to be ACCOUNTABLE for seeing that each action is implemented. This should not be the person assigned to do the action.
- » WHEN action will occur. You may incorporate mini-deadlines, or "start" and "stop" times if necessary. Be sure that you keep your timelines realistic.
- » HOW you plan to monitor the effectiveness of the action. How will you know that the problem has been solved?

As much as possible, keep the plan simple and focused. Anticipate barriers that might get in the way of implementing your plan successfully, and "problem solve" them ahead of time.

If problems are major or complex, don't wait for a "complete" solution – write down the first few steps that can be taken and get started.

If at all possible, **secure the commitment of top management to empower groups to make changes**. If every plan must be funneled up through channels to get approval before it can be implemented, a lot of momentum will be lost. Decision-making authority should be kept with the action-planning team as much as possible.

Step 3: Implement the Action Plan

Now implement the plan according to your schedule. Be open to feedback as you proceed. You will probably find that there will be a lot of "trial-and-error" before you fine-tune the solution to meet the needs of the majority of people.

Step 4: Monitor the effectiveness of the action plan

It is important to develop "tracking" procedures to monitor progress so that you know whether or not your plan is, in fact, solving the problem. You can monitor effectiveness in many ways:

- Monitor documentation. Many internal processes have numeric or written components that can be monitored.
- Do a follow-up "mini-survey" of those who would have been affected by your plan. Get their feedback as to how well it is working.
- Conduct a focus group of those affected to get some qualitative data on how well the plan is working.

The action planning team should plan to hold regular meetings during the initial implementation phase to share what they learn about how well the change is working. They should ask:

- Have target dates been met? If not, how can we get back on track? Should the schedule be changed?
- Has the problem been reduced or eliminated? How do we know?
- Can changes be made to the original solution to improve its effectiveness?
- Is the cost of the solution (in dollars, time, bureaucracy) still feasible?
- Is implementation affecting other areas that were not anticipated?
- What are employees' reactions? Do they LIKE the solution?

It is a good idea to report the results of action planning efforts to both management and employees on a continuing basis. This can be done by:

- Having regular meetings with management to review the status of the action plans.
- Filing regular progress reports with management.
- Reporting activities/progress back to employees on a regular basis via memos, newsletter articles, e-mail updates, etc.

As much as possible, make action-planning and follow-through part of existing accountability systems (normal performance reviews or status reports), rather than add new layers to the bureaucracy.

Planned, continuous communication helps ensure that action is really being taken – that things are not being allowed to "slide." It also helps ensure that employees understand the link between their survey input and changes that occur. This link completes the circle of the survey process.