



# Employee Surveys

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# Methodology

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This document is a reference for companies that are considering using the NCEO's employee survey resources to survey their work forces. It provides an overview of the methodological approach the survey is based on, covering the design of the survey items, the historical development of the survey, and the sources of survey items that are not the intellectual property of the NCEO.

# I. Design of Survey Items

## 1.1 Standard Survey Items

Most of the items offered by the NCEO are scored on a Likert scale indicating the degree to which a respondent agrees with the statement: from -3 ("strongly disagree") to 3 ("strongly agree"). The neutral point for these items is 0.

## 1.2 Negatively Worded Items

Most survey items are positively worded, so that agreement represents the more desirable response. Some of the items use negative wording. (For example, "This company rarely responds to employee suggestions.")

We use negative questions because researchers have found in some instances that respondents exhibit a response bias toward agreement. If agreement consistently produced a higher score, such a response bias would distort scores. To avoid this problem, we have included a certain number of negatively worded questions, for which agreement implies a lower score. In our actual experience with the survey, we have found no evidence of any such response bias.

## 1.3 Individual and Observer Items

The survey uses two distinct types of items, the first of which is "**cultural observer**" items. These items ask respondents to serve as observers of the organizational culture in which they work. They use phrases such as, "Employees at OurCo..." or "At this company..." to solicit observations. If one asks about potentially sensitive issues, such as how well people fulfill their responsibilities, survey respondents are often more candid and objective about the groups of which they are members than they are about themselves personally. Further, it is important for conceptual reasons to ask questions about the culture-the norms, values and behavior of whole groups-when using a cultural model for survey design and analysis.

As a complement to the cultural observer questions, other items in the list of survey items ask about **individual** respondents' experience. These items use phrases such as "I feel..." or else they state a position (i.e., "The company makes an effort to..."). This kind of item adds a dimension of individually-oriented information to the "informant" perspective and also gives individuals the opportunity to express their own views about their own circumstances, an opportunity that they frequently wish to have when participating in an organizational inquiry such as this.

## 2. The origins of the core survey items

The NCEO's survey items were developed by Dr. Christopher Mackin and Fred Freundlich of Ownership Associates, a consulting company based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Originally called the Ownership Culture Survey, the survey was first used in 1991 in response to a request of Polaroid Corporation. At the time, Polaroid was investing a substantial amount of corporate resources to create an ownership culture, and wanted a way to measure the success of their efforts.

The next phase in developing the survey took place in 1994, when a researcher affiliated with Ownership Associates, Lynn Engelskirchen, used portions of the OCS in her study of Stone Construction Equipment and Advanced Technological Solutions. In 1996, the OCS advanced rapidly, with Loren Rodgers, then a staffperson at Ownership Associates, dedicated to its promotion and development.

The survey served as the basis for substantial research, including the Ownership Culture Reports, the Shared Capitalism Research Project of the National Bureau of Economic Research, and the doctoral work of Eric Kaarsemaker at the Nijmegen School of Management (Netherlands). Amy Smith-Boden also used OCS data for her master's thesis work at the Netherlands Institute for MBA Studies (NIMBAS).

In 2005, Ownership Associates sold all rights to the survey items to the National Center for Employee Ownership. Now a project director at the NCEO, Loren Rodgers continues to manage the development and use of the survey. Dr. Corey Rosen, executive director of the NCEO, also guides its development.

## 3. Sources of survey items

The majority of survey items available from the NCEO are the intellectual property of the NCEO and originate from the work by Ownership Associates, described above. The secondary sources of survey items are described below.

Some items in the survey items now available from the NCEO were originally in the book *Employee Ownership in America* (Rosen, Corey, Katherine Klein, and Karen Young. *Employee Ownership in America: The Equity Solution*, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1986).

Other items are from the Worker Representation and Participation Survey (Freeman, Richard, and Joel Rogers. "Worker Representation and Participation Survey: First Report of Findings" in *Industrial Relations Research Association Series, proceedings of the Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting*, Paula B. Voos, Editor. Champagne, IL: Industrial Relations Research Association, 1995.)

Results from the Shared Capitalism Research Project of the National Bureau of Economic Research, which include some items originally from the NCEO's survey data, will be published in fall, 2007. A representative research paper reports on motivation in employee ownership companies. (See Kruse, Douglas, Richard Freeman, Joseph Blasi, Robert Buchele, Adria Scharf, Loren Rodgers, and Chris Mackin. "Motivating Employee-Owners in ESOP Firms: Human Resources Policies and Company Performance" in *Industrial Relations Research Association Proceedings 2003*, Champagne, IL: Industrial Relations Research Association, 2003.)

The General Social Survey, started in 1972, is one of the oldest data sets in the United States on social and economic issues. Currently it surveys a representative sample of 3000 US adults. For more on the GSS, see the Website of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, or visit <http://www.norc.uchicago.edu/projects/gensoc.asp>.