

Communication Brief

Tips on employee research and communication

Employee Focus Groups: Best Done in Person

You can conduct employee focus groups over the phone – sometimes that's the only sensible way to bring together remote employees. Meeting in person, however, provides a better way to gather information, as doing so helps you:

- **Build rapport.** Being in a room with participants, compared to hearing a set of disembodied voices on the telephone, creates a more intimate environment for discussion. It also fosters group interaction.
- **Lead the conversation.** In person, it's easier to cut off ramblers, engage quiet people, deter dominant participants and clarify remarks before others chime in. Your physical presence also encourages people to join the discussion and not multi-task.
- **Gauge nonverbal behavior.** If psychologist Albert Mehrabian is right, 55% of communication concerning attitudes and feelings is nonverbal. So there's no substitute for witnessing people's body language and facial expressions.
- **Judge group dynamics.** Being there live lets you experience how people respond to each other and assess the overall mood in the room. Are heads nodding in agreement? Do people seem tense or angry? Your observations provide context for people's comments.

Employee communication campaigns typically proceed through five phases. The key to succeeding at each phase is knowing what questions to ask, since the answers will shape your communication strategies. The chart below shows key issues to consider at each step in the process.

1. Contracting

- What needs to be communicated?
- Why is it important?
- What are the implications?

2. Researching

- Who is the target audience?
- What do they currently think?
- What would you like them to think?

3. Messaging

- What's the single most persuasive message to change people's attitudes?
- What information will reinforce positive beliefs, counter negative beliefs or enhance understanding?

4. Developing

- What's the best way to reach the target audience?
- What is the purpose of each planned communication tactic?
- What does the target audience think of our draft communications?

5. Assessing

- What was achieved through the communication campaign?
- How were the communications perceived?
- What messages still need to be reinforced?



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