

Communication Brief

Tips on employee research and communication

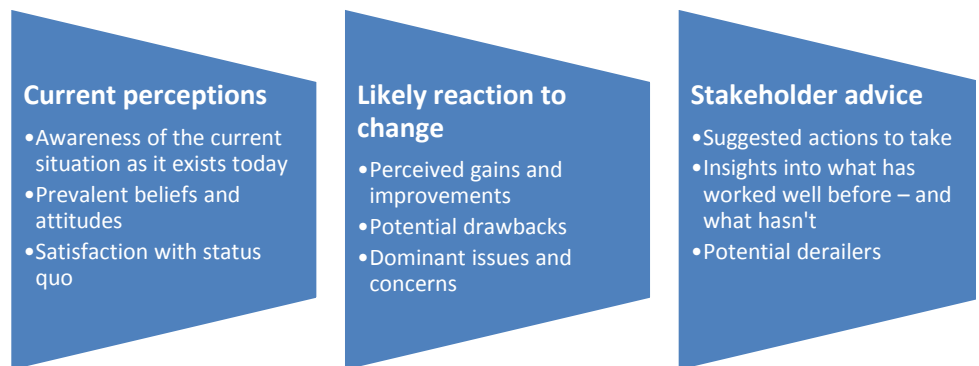
What's Wrong with Open-Ended Survey Questions?

Open-ended survey questions – i.e., those without fixed answer choices – pose no restrictions on respondents. They enable survey-takers to provide personalized replies that reflect opinions. So why would survey researchers not use them? Here are three good reasons:

- **Hard to code** – To be useful to the researcher, open-ended comments need to be coded into categories for analysis and interpretation. Such comments can be vague, however, making the coding process subjective and introducing added measurement error.
- **Requires verbal ability** – People differ in their ability to express opinions in words. Someone might be clumsy expressing himself, but know a lot about a surveyed topic. Someone else could be facile with words but have no meaningful insights. Open-ended questions confound people's verbal ability with their opinions.
- **Often skipped** – It takes more time to craft a written reply than to check a box on a scale. As a result, people are prone to skip open-ended questions, providing no data at all. This could lead the researcher to base conclusions on feedback from a small subset of the sample – a subset that may hold different beliefs than the majority of respondents.

Gauging Perceptions of Change

Before you begin communicating a major change, assess the impact on stakeholders and then gather their feedback in three key areas:



Example: Introducing a new sales force incentive plan

Stakeholder	Current Perceptions	Likely Reaction	Communication Advice
Sales Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing incentive plan is simple and straightforward • Existing plan works well, but has shortcomings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I might earn less under new plan • New plan might demotivate solid performers • New plan addresses customer concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare one-page overview of new goals and rewards • Train managers to have individual pay discussions
Salespeople	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely satisfied with existing plan • Plan caps potential for outsized rewards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I might earn less under new plan • Current strengths won't be rewarded • Sales will have new accountabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold one-on-one meetings to discuss plan implications • Conduct town hall meeting with sales leadership team
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing plan rewards wrong behaviors • Existing plan poorly differentiates pay for performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New plan enhances rewards tied to strategic goals • New plan promotes HR involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare HR briefing deck, talking points and Q&As • Hold HR conference calls to assess progress of roll out