The Survey Results Action Guide

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to offer suggestions for Federal agencies for successfully using their employee survey results in planning and implementing positive organizational change.

Provided by:

U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

Office of Policy and Evaluation

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Keys to Success

Get the most from your survey results!

- ⇒ Accept employee feedback as a gift
- ⇒ Act quickly
- ⇒ Select target areas
- ⇒ Communicate widely and often
- ⇒ Make it a team effort
- ⇒ Develop and implement action plans
- ⇒ Support improvement efforts
- ⇒ Hold people accountable
- ⇒ Evaluate and adjust
- ⇒ Make improvements visible

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ACCEPT EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK AS A GIFT

- **The survey results are a valuable gift**
- **Surveys create expectations of action**
- **Reap multiple benefits by using survey data**

Feedback is a gift	The feedback employees provide in a survey is a valuable gift—a gift intended to be used rather than stored away.
Surveys are a tool	The work begins, not ends, with survey results. A survey is a tool for meaningful dialogue among the members of an organization.
Surveys create expectations	When your organization conducts an employee survey, it is entering into a social contract with employees. Feedback is exchanged for management consideration and action. When employees provide information, they expect that management will listen to their input and use the information to improve the organization. If survey data is not used, the underlying message to employees is that leadership doesn't care about them or their opinions. Surveys not followed by concrete action can be demoralizing.

Accept Employee Feedback as a Gift (continued)

Why use your survey data?

Using employee survey data sends a message to employees that organizational leaders value their input and respect their time. It builds employee confidence that leadership will take action to respond to their concerns.

Employee surveys provide valuable data for improving your organization by identifying strengths and improvement needs.

If survey data is not used, employees are less likely to respond to future surveys. It will become increasingly difficult to obtain information from employees.

Applying the survey data to improve your organization can provide taxpayers with a substantial return on their investment. Surveys are expensive to develop and administer, especially in terms of employee time. If the results are not used, public dollars are wasted.

Using the survey data demonstrates to Congress and the public that your agency is making efforts to enhance organizational performance and results.

ACT QUICKLY

- **Communicate promptly**
- **The value of a survey is in action**

Communicate promptly

Once you receive employee survey results, move quickly to communicate the data and apply it.

It's important to act while the survey is still fresh in employees' minds. When people complete a survey they are excited about seeing the results and the possibility of change. They are open to participating in organizational change initiatives. Surveys energize people to take action. Strike while the iron is hot!

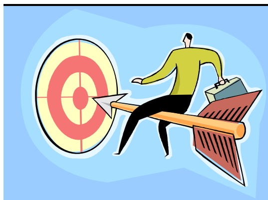
If time passes with no word about the survey results, enthusiasm wanes and frustration and disenchantment build. Employees may begin to see the survey as another pointless bureaucratic exercise.

Value is in action

Survey data is of little value in itself. Its value is derived from its use in driving positive organizational change.

Time guidelines

Communicate the survey results to employees within one month of receipt. Begin visible action planning by the following week.



SELECT TARGET AREAS

- **Create a review team**
- **Identify highs and lows**
- **Select areas for focus**

Who should be involved?	Select a group of eight to ten persons to conduct an initial review of the survey results and identify target action areas. Usually a one-day meeting is sufficient for identifying target areas if the participants are given the survey results to examine before the meeting. An effective review team typically includes a senior manager from each division, the HR Director (and the Chief Human Capital Officer if you have one), and at least one experienced organizational development specialist. You may also want to include union and/or other employee representatives. The meeting should be facilitated by someone experienced in using survey data to define organizational improvement needs and who is skilled in effectively facilitating meetings of senior managers.
Review by subcomponent	If you have the survey data broken down by agency subcomponent, you will want to review the data separately for each subcomponent because there may be major differences in strengths and improvement needs. In this case, you could have a separate review team for each subcomponent. That way, you can target change efforts to the specific areas of need within each subcomponent.
Begin with a quick scan	In the meeting, first familiarize yourselves with the survey by reviewing how it is organized into sections and reading through all the questions. This review will provide you with a good understanding of the survey content.
Data aids thinking	As you work through the survey, remember that data is an aid for thought, not a substitute.

Select Target Areas (continued)

Identify highs and lows	Review the results for each survey question and classify it as an area in which your organization is strong, is doing okay, or needs improvement. Agree on a definition for each category such as: • Strong = we have at least 80% favorable ratings (Note: You would first need to decide what "favorable" means, e.g., does it mean the combined responses of "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" or "Very Satisfied and "Satisfied" or does it mean only "Strongly Agree" or "Very Satisfied"? Many organizations consider a favorable rating as the combination of the top two positive choices.) • Doing okay = we have favorable ratings between 50% and 80% • Needs improvement = we have favorable ratings below 50% For survey questions that do not use a rating scale continuum, you will need to individually define for each question what constitutes a strength and what constitutes an improvement need. You may want to use symbols such as a + to mark strong areas, a √ for okay areas, and a – for weak areas or colors such as green for strengths, yellow for okay, and red for improvement needs.

Select Target Areas (continued)

Employee characteristics	If possible, check for differences by key employee characteristics such as gender, race and ethnicity, level, and supervisory status. If your agency receives the raw data for the survey as well as the survey report, or you receive a report in which the data is broken down by some of these characteristics, you will be able to check for these differences. Before the review meeting, the HR Director or Organizational Development Specialist can document and organize these results for review along with the overall results during the review meeting. There are often substantial differences among employees of disparate gender, race or ethnicity, level, and supervisory status that are masked if you only review the data for the agency or subcomponent overall. For example, in organizational surveys, supervisors typically provide more favorable ratings than non-supervisors.
Look for question clusters	Typically survey results will cluster so that organizations appear stronger in some areas and not so in others. Review how you classified each question and look for patterns. Are there clusters of closely related items in which your organization is strong or clusters which seem to need improvement? For example, there may be several questions about management communication with employees and your organization scored low on all or most of them. Circle these clusters or list the questions on a flip chart or whiteboard.

Compare to previous surveys

If you have the results for a previous survey with the same questions, compare the results from the current and previous survey, question by question. It is important to check that the survey results are directly comparable. For example, if missing responses are included in the response choice percentages in one survey but not in another, the percentages will need to be recalculated before the results of the two surveys can be compared.

Where has your agency made progress? Mark these questions with a “P”. Where has your agency declined? Mark these questions with a “D”. Where is there no or minimal change? Mark these questions with a zero.

The definition of minimal difference will vary with the question, the organization and its goals, the number of employees who answered the question, and other factors but you can define a rough guideline such as less than 5% so that differences of 5% or more are considered as a substantial change.

Select 1 to 3 Focus areas	In what areas is positive change most important to your organization? Select one to three survey areas to focus your efforts. An area can be composed of a cluster of several questions on the same topic or a single, stand-alone question. It should be a homogeneous area for which you can create one or more specific targeted objectives for change. If you select more than three focus areas, it will be difficult to concentrate your efforts and make substantial progress. It's far better to select only the top priorities and make significant strides than to select several focus areas and make limited progress. After you have reached your goals on the top priorities, you can work on additional areas.
Decide what to focus on	How do you decide which areas to focus on? Consider the following options to determine where positive change is most critical for your organization. • Special strengths you want to further enhance, especially strengths that align with your strategic plan and will help you meet your strategic goals • Questions or clusters that have a high percent of unfavorable responses and that are important for high performance • Questions or clusters in which the percentage of favorable responses has decreased significantly over time, e.g., more than 5% or 10% from the last survey • Areas of special concern in your organization due to management emphasis, current initiatives, complaints from employee groups, etc.

Select Target Areas (continued)

Importance	Be sure for each area of focus selected you can answer these two questions: • "Why is it important for us to work on this area? • "What benefits will we derive?"
Actionable	Be sure the areas you select for focus are directly actionable, i.e., within the power of your organization to change. For example, although the survey results may show that many employees are not satisfied with their pay, there may be little to nothing you can do about it. This would not be a good focus area. In contrast, if the survey results show that many employees feel that they are not receiving enough feedback from their supervisors, the organization can take several different actions to remedy the situation.
Observable change	It is recommended that at least one of the focus areas you select be amenable to observable, positive change within three or four months. It's important to demonstrate to employees that management listens to their input and takes definitive action. Some focus areas will take a year or more for change to be achieved or to show significant strides. That is fine. Often organizational problems are complex and require a series of integrated solutions. For these areas, plan how to show at least some progress or incremental change within a few months.
Move forward quickly	When the areas to be changed have been decided upon, it's time to share the survey results with employees and involve them in using the data to make positive changes. Communicating with employees and working with them to define and achieve specific objectives are discussed in the next two sections of this guide.

COMMUNICATE WIDELY AND OFTEN

- **Communicate to all employees**
- **Use multiple communication media**
- **Communicate frequently**

Surveys are tools for dialogue

Surveys drive positive organizational change by stimulating meaningful dialogue among leaders and employees about what is working well and what should be changed. The communication of the survey results and the ensuing conversations are far more important than the results themselves because it is the conversations that lead to effective action.

Communicate to all employees

Communicate the survey results to all employees at all levels and locations. Universal communication sends the message to employees that management considers them to be important stakeholders in the success of the agency.

Candid sharing of all results, both positive and negative, with a focus on applying the results also emphasizes the accountability of all employees for making the agency a good place to work.

Develop a communication plan

A communication plan will help you communicate effectively and thoroughly so that all employees hear and understand the survey results. A plan will outline the information to be communicated and how and with whom it will be shared. It serves as a handy guide throughout the communication process.

Communicate Widely and Often (continued)

Plan contents	Create a communication plan that includes the following for each message to be communicated: • Timeline – when the information will be communicated • Audience – to whom the information will be communicated • Objective – the purpose of sharing the information • Content – the key points to be communicated • Media – how it will be communicated, e.g., in-person meeting, e-mail message, teleconference call, printed memos A sample communication plan is included in the Tool Kit section of this guide. A template you can customize to meet your agency's needs is also included.
Begin with leaders	The first step in communicating survey results is to share the results with organizational leadership and obtain their commitment to using the data to improve the organization. Leaders need to understand the results so they will be able to present the results to employees and answer their questions. They also need to make a firm commitment to allocate time and resources to apply the results and ensure that they will hold people accountable for taking action.
Share the survey results with all employees	After organizational leaders learn the survey results, the next step is to share the results with all employees. The most effective approach is to have the leaders directly communicate the results to all employees and explain how the survey data will be used. When leaders deliver the information, it signals the value and importance of the survey results. Direct communication also provides employees with insights about the thoughts and reactions of their leaders.

Communicate Widely and Often (continued)

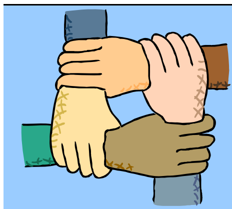
Live meetings	Survey results can be communicated to employees in several different ways. Usually the most powerful approach is to conduct a town hall or all hands meeting for employees in an auditorium or rented ballroom or via teleconference or video conference. This approach is much more personal than an e-mail message or printed memo and highlights the importance of the information. If employees work in many locations or on different shifts, a series of meetings can be held to include everyone.
Cascading the results	If a live meeting, or series of meetings, of all employees with top leaders is not feasible, a good alternative is to have top leaders share the results with managers who in turn share it with their supervisors and employees. The managers need to emphasize the importance placed on the survey results by top leaders and explain how the data will be used. Employee dialogue needs to be included in these meetings also.

Communicate Widely and Often (continued)

Use simple, clear formats for results	When the survey results are presented by leaders or managers, be sure they are presented in a clear, easily understood format. A good structure is to group the results into areas of strength, areas for improvement, and areas that are satisfactory but not notable. Use simple graphs and charts to present the results.
Focus on highlights	It typically works well to distribute to employees a printed summary of the results for all questions but to present and discuss in the meeting only the areas of greatest strength and areas that most need improvement. If previous surveys were conducted, also compare the differences over time and discuss the areas that improved and the areas that declined.
Describe focus areas	Describe the focus areas chosen and explain why they were selected as top priorities.
Explain next steps	Describe the next steps for how and when the data will be used to address the focus areas. For example, a recommended sequence of steps include: 1. Form an employee team for each focus area 2. Collect additional information as needed to identify the underlying issues 3. Develop specific objectives for each focus area 4. Develop an action plan for achieving each objective 5. Implement the action plans 6. Evaluate the actions taken and revise them as needed. This sequence of steps would be described to employees along with an estimated schedule.

Communicate Widely and Often (continued)

Request volunteers	Ask for volunteers for each team. Explain that not everyone who volunteers may be asked to join a team because the teams will be balanced to represent each division and relevant employee characteristics. Describe the characteristics deemed important for the issue such as supervisory status, level, type of occupation, etc. Emphasize that all employees have a role in using the survey data to promote positive change. Effective organizational changes require the commitment and support of all employees, not just the few who lead the effort. Those who are not team members may initially contribute by sharing their concerns and ideas for action planning. Then, as appropriate, they can actively participate in implementing the action plans.
Time is of the essence	Remember to move quickly in sharing the survey results with employees. It is best to communicate the results within one month after they are received.
Follow-up communications	Follow up the initial employee meetings with frequent additional communications describing the objectives for each focus area, the action plans, and then the progress of the plan implementations. The communications will be optimally effective if they come from leaders. These follow-up communications can be delivered through a variety of media including: • Staff meetings • E-mail messages • Printed memos • Posters • Intranet bulletins • Voice mail bulletins



MAKE IT A TEAM EFFORT

- **Involve all employees**
- **Form teams**
- **Select the best solution**
- **Develop SMART objectives**

Involve employees	Employee commitment and involvement is a key ingredient for successful organizational change. People are much more likely to support solutions that they played a part in creating. If possible, involve employees at all levels and locations in applying the survey results. As noted above, when the survey results are communicated, ask for volunteers to participate on survey teams. Encourage all employees to offer suggestions and comments through a physical or online suggestion box, meetings with team members, e-mails, or staff meetings.
Make participation a privilege	Make it a privilege to participate in applying the survey results. Present it as an exciting and rewarding opportunity to have an important role in shaping the future of the organization and making it an even better place to work. When you call for volunteers, make it clear that this Is a high visibility project that will benefit both the employees and the organization. If feasible, provide incentives for participation.
Name the teams	It's helpful to give the teams a title or acronym that is easy to say and remember, e.g., ESAT (Employee Survey Action Team), Survey Warriors, PSI (Problem Solvers Inc.).
Focus the teams	It's usually most effective to form teams that focus on just one of the areas that you have identified for strengthening. Thus, if you have chosen two areas to work on, you could form two teams; if you chose three areas, you could form three teams.

Team composition	When you select team members from among those who volunteer, consider the employee characteristics that are important for the team's focus area. In many cases, you will want to have representation from each division and each job level or occupation with a mix of employees, supervisors, and union representatives as appropriate. For other issues, it will also be important to ensure both genders and most racial/ethnic groups are included. For some issues, age, years of work experience or other employee characteristics should also be considered. You will also want to ensure that the people selected for the team have good interpersonal skills and a record of meeting their commitments.
Team leader	A team leader should be selected who has successful experience in leading teams, is well organized, has strong analytical abilities, and has a record of consistently meeting schedule and deliverable commitments. The team leader is responsible for scheduling and conducting team meetings and serving as a project manager for developing and implementing an action plan. The team leader should also be accountable for communicating obstacles and resource and support needs to management.
Executive champion	Each team should have an executive champion who provides visibility for the team's work, resources, and encouragement and holds the team accountable for results.

Make It a Team Effort (continued)

Management sponsor	The team should also have a sponsoring manager who provides input from the management perspective, works with the team to resolve any problems or obstacles, and serves as a liaison with the executive champion. The manager reviews and approves action plans, monitors their progress, and addresses implementation problems that are outside the team's scope of authority.
Team meetings	The team should meet on a regular schedule. Weekly meetings are suggested because they maintain group momentum and move the action forward quickly. Bi-weekly meetings can also be productive if the team members perform tasks in the interim between meetings. Monthly meetings are typically insufficient because it takes too long to make progress.
Team responsibilities	The executive champion and management sponsor should be present at the first team meeting. They should explain the team's focus area, why it was selected as an organizational priority, and then define the team's responsibilities. These responsibilities will probably include the following: 1. Review in detail the survey data related to the focus area 2. Identify possible reasons for employee responses based on the team members' experiences working in the organization 3. Determine if additional information needs to be collected and collect it 4. Define one or more specific objectives for the focus area 5. Develop an action plan to achieve each objective 6. Implement the action plans 7. Evaluate the success of the action plans.

Make It a Team Effort (continued)

Explore underlying issues

After the executive champion and management sponsor have explained the focus area and defined the team's responsibilities, they will typically leave. The team members will continue the meeting by reviewing together the survey data related to the focus area. The team should discuss possible reasons for employee responses.

There are usually several alternative interpretations for each survey question. For example, for a question such as "I have trust and confidence in my supervisor," employees may have been thinking many different things when indicating they disagreed with this statement. Just a few of numerous possibilities are:

- I'm not sure who my supervisor is.
- I rarely talk with my supervisor so I don't know if I can trust him or her.
- My supervisor says one thing and does another.
- My supervisor lies to me.
- My supervisor's first priority is himself.
- My supervisor doesn't care about me.
- I've never seen my supervisor in a situation in which trust was an issue.
- My supervisor plays favorites.

Multiple perspectives

The goal of the discussion is to identify several possibilities and determine how to identify which are most likely. It is important to not take a question on its face value or immediately assume you understand the meaning of employee responses. Consider many perspectives.

It's critical to accurately identify the reasons for unfavorable employee responses so that a solution that truly addresses the underlying issues can be devised. If a strength is the areas of focus, it's important to ask the question, "What are we doing right?" and therefore should keep doing.

Questions to consider – problem areas	For a problem area, ask the question, "What is the source of our deficiency in this area?" Consider these factors and others: • Inadequate knowledge or skills • Inadequate authority • Lack of information • Inadequate or outdated equipment or other resources • Insufficient staff • Poor work flow • Lack of time • Inadequate funds • Conflicting demands • Organizational constraints • Rewarding not to do it • Punishing to do it • Doesn't matter much if we do it • We don't care enough about it
Questions to consider – strength areas	For areas of strength, ask the question, "What is the source of our strength and how can we draw more deeply from this source?" Consider these factors and others: • Motivated people • Continual improvement culture • Learning organization • Open, trusting culture • Strong supervisor-employee relationships • Clear performance expectations • Strong knowledge and skills • Good project management • Service orientation • Strong sense of mission • Employee empowerment • There are clear consequences for positive and negative behaviors • Peer pressure for high performance

Collect more data

After discussing the possible reasons for employee responses, often a team will decide that they need to collect additional information to accurately interpret employee responses and make the best use of the survey data. There are several possible approaches to expeditiously collecting this information. Here are some suggestions:

- Team members meet with their work units to request their input. This can be done in 30 minutes or less by simply asking colleagues to explain why they think employees may have given the response and discussing the possibilities.

- More formal focus groups can be conducted with a structured protocol of specific questions to be answered.

- Team members can each interview a few employees to ask for their perspective.

- Employees in the work unit can be asked to share examples of their related experiences by responding to an e-mail request, completing an online form, or simply jotting down examples on a piece of paper.

- For questions related to supervisory behavior, employees can be asked to anonymously answer three questions:
    1. What do they want their supervisor to START doing?
    2. What do they want their supervisor to STOP doing?
    3. What do they want their supervisor to CONTINUE doing?

A wealth of insight can be obtained from the answers to these three simple questions. A bonus of this method is that a summary of the responses can also be given to the supervisor as upward feedback from their employees. Many supervisors will be surprised to learn what their employees say.

Multiple perspectives	When a team collects additional information, it is important to obtain the information from several different relevant sources to expand the perspective. For example, when focusing on a question regarding supervisory behavior, it is critical to solicit input from employees, supervisors, and managers.
Reach a conclusion	After the additional information is collected, the team will review and discuss it, interpret it, and arrive at specific conclusions. For example, if the team's focus question is "I have trust and confidence in my supervisor," the team may conclude that the underlying reason that many employees disagree with this statement is that supervisors and employees have not developed strong working relationships. Perceptions could be that supervisors do not talk with their employees very often and infrequently discuss the employees' work with them.
Identify solutions	After the underlying causes for the problem or strength are identified, the team brainstorms and then discusses possible approaches to take. Often good ideas will be contained in the additional information collected from employees.

Compare the solutions

Discuss these questions to select the best solution for your organization:

- Which approach is likely to be most effective?
- Which approach promises the most benefits for the least cost in resources of people, time, and money?
- What are our constraints for investing time, money, or people in this approach?
- Which approach are we best equipped to try?
- Do we have the knowledge, skills, or abilities needed for this approach? If not, can we quickly develop or acquire them?
- Are there ethical, legal, or organizational constraints?
- Can we support this with enthusiasm
- What obstacles might we encounter? How much effort would it take to surmount these obstacles?
- What have we tried before? What worked? What didn't work?

Integrated solutions

When considering solutions, it's important to keep in mind that stand alone acts of improvement such as a leadership retreat, training event, or a job aid will not lead to sustainable positive change. Solutions should be part of a management system in which all the related pieces are aligned and complement each other.

"Can Do" Attitude	If there seem to be serious obstacles to doing what the team thinks needs to be done, ask what is stopping you. If the team can't do it, who can? Enlist their help. Focus on what CAN be done. It may not be possible to immediately make large scale changes, but all organizations can begin with small, incremental, well planned changes that lead to major improvements over time.
Select the best solutions	Rank potential solutions in terms of effectiveness and potential limitations. Select the best overall approaches with a strong chance of success. The top solutions should be discussed with the sponsoring manager and executive champion. Agreement needs to be reached about which solution will best serve organizational needs. If a selected solution will change working conditions for some groups of employees, it may be necessary to discuss the proposed solution with union representatives.
Define SMART objectives	The next step is to develop specific, concrete objectives that transform the chosen solution into operational terms. The acronym "SMART" is a good way to remember the vital elements of a good objective. • **S**pecific – the objective should be clear and concrete, stating in behavioral terms what will happen • **M**easurable – the achievement of the goal can be measured and evaluated • **A**chievable – the organization has the capabilities to actually accomplish the objective; it is practical • **R**elevant – achieving the objective will make a significant positive difference for the organization • **T**ime-bound – specific time parameters are included

Example of SMART objective	For example, the team that selected trust and confidence as a focus may develop several specific objectives for promoting behaviors that they believe over time will develop stronger working relationships between employees and supervisors and build trust. One of their objectives could be: "Beginning in March 2008, every supervisor will meet at least every two weeks with each employee for an individual update meeting to discuss the employee's work and development progress and other work-related issues as needed. The supervisor will document the meeting using the *Update Meeting* form provided."
Non-example of SMART objective	An example of a poorly written objective is: "Supervisors and employees will meet on a regular basis."
Notes on objectives	The team may develop one or several objectives to address the focus area, depending on the issues uncovered and their complexity. Objectives should not include specific percentage increases on the next survey. The goal is to change organizational behaviors, not survey ratings. When survey ratings become the focus, the importance of changing behaviors is lost. Also, if ratings are the focus, executives and managers may try to take actions they believe will increase the ratings but that do not address underlying problems.

Inform stakeholders	Before moving further, be sure to inform stakeholders, those who will be affected by the planned objective, of the objectives and give them an opportunity to comment either through a meeting or in writing. Not everyone will agree with the objective and, in some cases, there may be strong opposition. Consider possible underlying reasons for any objections and either revise the objective or educate the dissenters. Support from the executive champion and the management sponsor will be important in addressing opposition. Remember that there will rarely be an objective that pleases everyone. What is important is to do what is best for the organization. Sometimes courage is required to move forward.

DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT AN ACTION PLAN

- **Determine how to measure success**
- **Develop a step-by-step plan**
- **Implement the plan**

Action plan contents

To ensure your objectives are achieved, it is helpful to develop an action plan for each. The plans can be simple but need to include these seven elements:

1. A brief description of the focus area
2. The objective
3. How the accomplishment of the objective will be measured
4. The specific actions that will be taken to achieve the objective
5. The resources needed
6. The due date for each action
7. The person(s) responsible for each action

A sample action plan and template is included in the Tool Kit section of this guide.

Focus area

Describe the focus area concisely and clearly in terms of a positive outcome. A phrase or a sentence usually suffices. For example, "Facilitate the development of trust by helping supervisors and employees build stronger working relationships."

Objective

List the SMART objective you developed. For example, "Beginning in February 2008, every supervisor will meet at least every two weeks with each employee for an individual update meeting to discuss the employee's work and development progress and other work-related issues as needed. The supervisor will document the meeting using the *Update Meeting* form provided."

Measurement

Briefly explain how you will determine if the objective is achieved. If appropriate, set a baseline to measure improvements.

For example, (1) "Each supervisor's manager will talk with the supervisor during their own bi-weekly update about the meetings the supervisor has conducted with employees over the past two weeks and review the *Update Meeting* forms completed by the supervisor for those meetings. The manager will submit a record of the meetings conducted by supervisors to his or her manager the last week of each quarter."

(2) Each manager's manager will talk with the manager during their own bi-weekly update about the meetings the manager has conducted with supervising employees over the past two weeks and review the *Update Meeting* forms completed by the manager for those meetings. The manager's manager will submit a record of the meetings conducted by supervisors and managers to the executive the last week of each quarter."

Develop and Implement an Action Plan (continued)

Action steps

To create the action plan, divide the selected solutions into discrete, concrete steps. The action steps should include tasks that will surmount any identified potential barriers to implementation. List the action steps in the sequence in which they will occur.

For example, the action steps to achieve the objective of bi-weekly update meetings could be:

1. Develop brief training programs to help the supervisors learn how to conduct update meetings and help the employees to get the most out of the updates
2. The Division executive meets with all employees to inform them of the new practice
3. Supervisors and managers participate in the training
4. Employees participate in the training
5. Supervisors schedule the update meetings with each employee on a regular, bi-weekly timetable
6. The update meetings are held and the update forms are completed
7. Each supervisor's manager talks with the supervisor during their own bi-weekly update about the meetings the supervisor has conducted with his or her employees over the past two weeks and reviews the completed *Update Meeting* forms.
8. The last week of each quarter managers submit a record of all the updates to the executive.

Develop and Implement an Action Plan (continued)

Think small and meaningful	When you develop the action steps, think in terms of how you can create opportunities for small but meaningful accomplishments that will add up to important changes. If the team can immediately "fix" small things, employees will feel that the time spent responding to the survey was worthwhile and their input is valued. As small achievements accumulate, employees see that positive change is indeed possible and can visualize more positive differences in the future. Success generates more success and creates an optimistic mindset open to still more change. Resistance is weakened and supporters emerge. If your organization tends to be risk adverse and cherish the status quo, incremental changes are often more palatable. There is less risk and upheaval involved so employees feel more comfortable.
Resources	Consider the resources needed to accomplish each step. The resources may include time, people, materials, tools, training, authority, or information. In the bi-weekly updates example, the resources needed are the time of supervisors and employees to participate in the updates, training, tools (the update form), and authority (the Division executive communicates that the updates are a required Division practice).
Due dates	Set a due date for each action step. Make it realistic but aggressive.

Develop and Implement an Action Plan (continued)

Accountability	Assign accountability to one or more individuals for the on-time completion for each action step. Remember that all employees are responsible for creating an excellent work environment and involve employees as much as possible. More information on accountability is included later in this guide.
Implementation	The employees designated as accountable carry out their assigned responsibilities to implement the action plan. Team meetings should continue during this implementation period. Members should report progress at each meeting. If the expected progress is not being achieved, the team should work together to develop a solution. Information on measuring progress is provided in the Evaluation section of this guide.

SUPPORT IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

- **Visible commitment**
- **Communication**
- **Provide resources, coaching, and recognition**

Visible commitment	A key ingredient in successful, sustained organizational change is providing support for improvement efforts. Visible commitment by leadership is essential. Employees are watching their leaders closely to see if their actions align with their words.
Clear communication	Leadership needs to make it crystal clear that the improvement effort is an organizational priority and they stand behind it 100%. This message is best communicated in an all hands meeting or a series of smaller meetings. This meeting follows up the first meeting in which the survey results were shared and the intent to improve was announced. Now, leaders explain the specific objectives, introduce the teams who will be working to achieve each objective, and share the action plans. Each employee's role in achieving the objectives should be emphasized, be it direct action or cooperation.
Time	Allow team members and others assigned action plan accountability the time required to accomplish their tasks. In some cases, employees' usual assignments will need to be reduced. Maintain the high priority of the action plan. Avoid revising priorities so that the change activities are forced into "as time is available" status. Providing adequate time is essential to success.

Support Improvement Efforts (continued)

Encouragement	Frequent communication about action plan progress will demonstrate leadership's continued interest and boost the confidence of the employees working the action plan. The executive champion and sponsoring manager should frequently check in with the teams on their progress and provide encouragement and assistance as needed.
Knowledge and Skills	Be sure everyone involved in implementing the objectives has the knowledge and skills they need to participate effectively in the change. For example, in the action plan for the bi-weekly update objective, an important step is providing training to both supervisors and employees so that they are prepared to participate productively in update meetings.
Information	Information is often an important part of change solutions and needs to be built into the action plan. For example, if the focus area is improving communication between organizational leaders and employees, an important action would be to inform employees of existing and planned communication channels.
Tools	In many cases, employees will need new or upgraded tools to effectively implement the desired change. If these are not provided, the initiative may fail. Tools may include equipment such as computers or scanners, software, job aids, or other devices. In the bi-weekly update example, the update form is a job aid that will facilitate dialogue in the meetings between supervisors and employees.

Support Improvement Efforts (continued)

Coaching	The executive champion and management sponsor can increase the chances of success by: • Encouraging employees to try out new ways of working and interacting that align with the changes and helping them see the changes as a great opportunity for development. • Assisting the team in responding positively to unexpected events and working around obstacles. • Coaching the team through adjustments in the action plan if the emerging solution is proving unworkable.
Monitor progress	Each action team leader should report on the team's progress and any obstacles faced to the sponsoring manager. Problems or potential problems can then be promptly addressed by a change in the action plan, revised work assignments and priorities of team members, additional communication by management, or other means.
Recognition	Recognition of progress both fuels motivation and communicates that the improvement effort is important. Organizational leaders need to acknowledge the accomplishments of everyone involved, both those accountable for the action plan and those who supported it through their participation. Communicating successes to all employees signals the value the organization places on goal achievement and the importance of the improvement. Simple words of praise or a thank you note are fine for small steps. Celebrations for major milestones are an excellent morale booster.

Two-way communication	It's important for the champion and sponsor to listen to employee concerns and respond with reassurance, information, direction, or action. Listen to the underlying concerns, not just the surface messages. For example, if supervisors say they don't have time to conduct update meetings, are they really saying they are not comfortable conducting these meetings? Are they saying they don't think the meetings are important? The supervisors may need some coaching in conducting the meetings or they may need to be told that these meetings are a critical part of their job responsibilities and will be included in their performance appraisals.
Resistance to change	Fear and anxiety are a natural and common response to change. An atmosphere of openness is vital to coping with resistance and addressing the needs of people affected by change. Employees at all levels may be concerned over a real or perceived loss of power, prestige, flexibility, or a comfortable status quo. They may be anxious about new job requirements or increased demands on their time or uncertain about the intention of the change and how it will affect existing work structures and relationships. Resistance can take many forms including negative attitudes, active or passive refusal to participate in the change, reduced productivity, decreased work quality, increased absenteeism, political maneuvers, or even outright sabotage. The key is to recognize the possibility of resistance and be prepared to deal with it effectively, quickly, and compassionately.

Post implementation support	Be sure to plan how to provide the organizational support mechanisms that will ensure the continuous and consistent effectiveness of the improvement once it is implemented. Sometimes, after the initial flush of success, the support provided by an organization diminishes and the good results correspondingly diminish. The support needed to keep the solution functioning smoothly may include close oversight, dedicated staff time, materials, well-maintained equipment or software, close coordination with other groups, periodic refresher training, or any of a wide range of other support needs. For example, after implementation of the biweekly update plan, it is important that managers continue to routinely check that supervisors are indeed meeting biweekly with their employees.

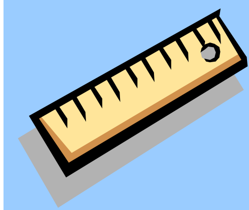
HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE

- **Publish action plans**
- **Implement meaningful consequences**

Accountability is key	Holding people accountable for results is absolutely essential for positive organizational change. People must know what they need to do, when they need to do it, and that there will be positive consequences for meeting their commitments and negative consequences if they don't.
Publish action plans	Post the action plans and keep them updated so that target dates are widely known and accomplishments can be noted by all employees. Publishing the survey action plans on your agency or division intranet site is a great way to motivate people to accomplish the actions on schedule. The action plans could also be distributed in paper to employees or posted on bulletin boards. Publicizing the action plan to your customers or the public at large on the agency web site also makes accountability clear and sends the message that you are working to improve.
Assign accountability	To hold people accountable, you have to be clear on who is accountable, what they are accountable for, and what positive or negative consequences can be expected as a result of carrying out the action plan(s). For each item in the action plan, assign a specific person who is accountable for carrying out an action or ensuring that others carry out that action.
Implement consequences	Accountability exists only when there are meaningful consequences for fulfilling or not fulfilling responsibilities. Follow through is vital. Make it clear at the outset for everyone involved in the action planning and implementation process that the survey work is valued and is considered as an important part of their work.

Hold People Accountable (continued)

Reward achievements	Recognize and reward achievements in a manner commensurate with the level of achievement. Recognition could include a handwritten thank you note from a manager or executive, taking the employees out to lunch, a certificate or plaque, small awards such as movie passes, a celebration party, a more flexible work schedule, an especially desirable assignment, time off, team leadership, a monetary award or salary increase, a higher performance rating, a valued development opportunity, or other rewards.
Negative consequences	For those who do not accomplish their assigned responsibilities, there should be negative consequences appropriate to the level of inadequate performance. It should be made clear to the employee that the consequence is a direct result of the employee's failure to successfully accomplish the assigned task(s). Before deciding on a negative consequence, managers need to check with their Human Resources office on the allowable options.
A note about line ownership	The survey results and the action plans belong to line employees and managers, not to Human Resources. It is line management who must be held accountable for the survey action plans. To help ensure widespread buy-in and ultimately, positive results, a cardinal rule is to make sure that the use of the survey data is clearly the province of line management rather than Human Resources. Line management should communicate the survey results, interpret the results, identify focus areas, and oversee the creation, implementation and evaluation of the action plans. The role of Human Resources is to recommend direction, offer technical guidance, and provide support for action planning.



EVALUATE AND ADJUST

- **Monitor progress**
- **Make adjustments**

Monitor your progress

The survey team's job is not over once the action plans are developed. The team should still oversee progress and make adjustments where necessary. During regular team meetings, plan time to evaluate the progress you have made on the improvement action plans. Have each team member responsible for a task report on the progress made thus far and the progress expected by the next team meeting. Include this information in the minutes of your meeting.

Discuss what is working well and what is not. Figure out how you could make your improvement efforts more effective or efficient. Offer advice, assistance, and encouragement to each other. Apply a little group pressure to team members who are not meeting their commitments.

In reviewing the team's progress, consider these issues:

- Timeliness – Is the plan on track? Are milestones being met?
- Effectiveness – Does it appear that the planned actions will work? Are there signs of potential problems?
- Unanticipated consequences – Are the actions creating new problems or other undesirable consequences?

If your action plan just doesn't seem to be working, discuss how you can revise it. You may need to take another approach and begin again.

Measure achievement of your objectives

As part of the action planning process, you decided how and when you would measure achievement of the objectives you defined. At the times you specified for each objective, apply your measures and discuss the results.

If you achieved your objective, it's time to celebrate as a team! Your celebration could be a treat shared at a team meeting, a potluck lunch, going out to breakfast or lunch together, or an exchange of gag gifts. Choose a celebration that will be fun for all of you.

Don't forget to document the lessons learned.

If you did not achieve your objective

If you did not achieve your objective, figure out why. Discussing the questions below will help.

- Did we select a valid, accurate measure of achievement?
- What factors interfered with our plans?
- Were interfering factors beyond our control?
- If not, what could we have done better?
- Was the objective unrealistic?
- Do we need to modify the objective?
- Did team members fulfill their commitments?
- What lessons did we learn?

Your team will find it useful to document your answers to these questions so you can use this information in planning other improvements.

After you have determined why you did not achieve your objective, discuss your conclusions with the team champion and sponsor and with them decide whether to maintain the objective as is and continue working on it, revise it and try again, or drop it entirely and work on another priority for improvement.

If you decide to retain the objective or revise it, discuss what you can do to ensure you meet your objective this time and prepare another action plan.

MAKE IMPROVEMENTS VISIBLE

- **Highlight success**
- **Highlight management responsiveness**
- **Share accomplishments and lessons learned**

Highlight success

Make accomplishments highly visible by publicly thanking the survey teams. Thank the responsible employees and communicate to everyone how the work will improve the organization. Use the good results as an opportunity to discuss the value of a continuous improvement mindset.

The public announcements of success and expressions of gratitude can take place at staff meetings or at large scale events. There are many ways to make an event special such as hanging posters thanking the team members, decorating the room with balloons, ribbons, or flowers, serving refreshments, distributing awards, or giving a slide presentation of the team at work. It is also a good idea to have colleagues share how the change has positively impacted them or their work. If appropriate, team work products can be distributed for all to see.

Emphasize responsiveness

Survey work presents a great opportunity for managers to demonstrate that they listen and respond to employees' feedback. When changes in the organization are made based on the survey feedback and resulting action plans, be sure to tell employees and the public, if appropriate, that the actions are being taken because of the survey.

The organization should get full credit for using the survey results. Sometimes organizations make changes based on survey results but don't tell employees. The employees may believe nothing happened in response to their input and become cynical. Emphasize the organization's responsiveness.

Make Improvements Visible (continued)

Share lessons learned	Share lessons learned as well as successes. Help others to learn both from what worked well and what did not work well. Sharing learning demonstrates a deep commitment to improvement. It sends the message that both mistakes and successes are part of the change process and helps others avoid problems in the future.
Share the wealth	Share both accomplishments and lessons learned with other organizations in your agency, with other agencies, and external professional colleagues. This can be done at all levels. Managers and executives can discuss the teams' experiences with their peers. Supervisors and team members can talk about their discoveries and experiences with their colleagues. All can make presentations or write articles for professional associations. Doing so enhances the reputation of both the agency and the Federal Government at large.
Build on success	When the teams' objectives have been achieved, build on success by choosing another issue raised by the survey and work it through the same discussion and action planning steps. Each effort you make to improve effectiveness will bring you closer to achieving your potential as a high performance organization.

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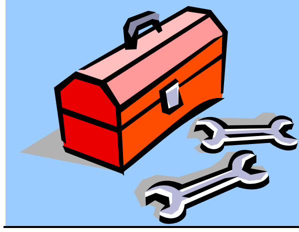

TOOL KIT

- **Communication Plan Template**
- **Sample Communication Plan**
- **Survey Action Plan Template**
- **Sample Survey Action Plan**

COMMUNICATION PLAN

Timeline	Audience	Objective	Content	Media

SAMPLE COMMUNICATION PLAN

Timeline	Audience	Objective	Content	Media
11/26/07	Managers	• Share survey results • Obtain commitment to action	• Review & discuss the survey results • Identify review team members	Meeting
12/4/07	All employees	• Executive shares the survey results • Solicit volunteers	• Review survey highlights • Identify focus areas • Explain next steps • Employees break into small groups to discuss • Q & A • Request volunteers	All Hands meeting Printed summary of results
12/11/07	All employees	• Disseminate team action plans	• Explain action teams • Share each team plan • Explain role of each employee	Division meetings
12/19/07 1/3/08	All employees	• Report team progress	• Describe the progress made, any changes to the plans, and the impact on employees	E-mail bulletins
1/7/08	All employees	• Announce implementation of plans	• Announce plan implementation • Explain how the plan will be implemented & what it means for employees • Recognize team members & others • Celebrate success	All Hands meeting
2/7/08	Supervisors & managers	• Executive reminds supervisors & managers of their role in supporting the change	• Emphasize value of the change • Review supervisors' & managers' role • Discuss any obstacles & how to resolve them	Meeting
2/7/08	All employees	• Executive reinforces value of the change	• Emphasize value of the change • Encourage dialogue • Remind employees of their role	E-mail bulletin
Each quarter	All employees	• Progress report • Encouragement	• Inform employees of continued progress & encourage continued support	• E-mail bulletin • Posters

SURVEY ACTION PLAN

Date:

Focus:

Objective:

How progress will be measured:

Action	Resources Needed	Due Date	Person(s) Accountable

SAMPLE SURVEY ACTION PLAN

Date: December 10, 2007

Focus: Facilitate the development of trust by helping supervisors and employees build stronger working relationships.

Objective: Beginning in February 2008, every supervisor will meet at least every two weeks with each employee for an individual update meeting to discuss the employee's work and development progress and other work-related issues as needed. The supervisor will document the meeting using the *Update Meeting* form provided.

How progress will be measured:

(1)Each supervisor's manager will talk with the supervisor during their own bi-weekly update about the meetings the supervisor has conducted with employees over the past two weeks and review the *Update Meeting* forms completed by the supervisor for those meetings. The manager will submit a record of the meetings conducted by supervisors to his or her manager the last week of each quarter.

(2) Each manager's manager will talk with the manager during their own bi-weekly update about the meetings the manager has conducted with supervising employees over the past two weeks and review the *Update Meeting* forms completed by the manager for those meetings. The manager's manager will submit a record of the meetings conducted by supervisors and managers to the executive the last week of each quarter.

Action	Resources Needed	Due Date	Person(s) Accountable
Develop brief training programs to help the supervisors learn how to conduct update meetings and the employees to get the most out of the updates	Staff support for preparing training materials & job aids Funds for materials About 40 hours for each program	1/4/08	Keisha Brown – supervisor training Jon Lee– employee training
The Division executive meets with all employees to inform them of the new practice	Meeting space & sound system One hour time for each employee to attend	1/7/08	Ron Bertoia coordinates meeting Maria Diaz presents All employees attend

Action	Resources Needed	Due Date	Person(s) Accountable
Supervisors and managers participate in the training	Training space Flip charts & markers LCD projector & screen Guide for each participant One hour time for each participant	1/25/08	Keisha Brown delivers training All supervisors & managers attend
Employees participate in the training	Training space Flip charts & markers LCD projector & screen Guide for each participant One hour time for each participant	1/25/08	Jon Lee delivers training All employees attend
Supervisors schedule the update meetings with each employee on a regular, bi-weekly timetable	Group calendars	1/28/08	All supervisors
The update meetings are held and the update forms are completed	Update forms About 30 minutes per meeting	Bi-weekly beginning 2/4/08	All supervisors, managers & employees
Each supervisor's manager talks with the supervisor during their own bi-weekly update about the meetings the supervisor has conducted with his or her employees over the past two weeks and reviews the completed *Update Meeting* forms.	Update forms About 60 minutes per meeting	Bi-weekly beginning 2/4/08	All managers
The last week of each quarter managers submit a record of all the updates to the executive.	Documentation log	Each quarter beginning 3/08	All managers