

# Communication Brief

*Tips on employee research and communication*

## Sources of Survey Error

A common mistake when evaluating the significance of survey findings is to focus only on the number of respondents, while ignoring other potential sources of error.

The word error in this case does not mean “mistake”; it refers to the difference between a survey’s results and what’s true about the population of interest. Below are four major sources of survey error to consider:

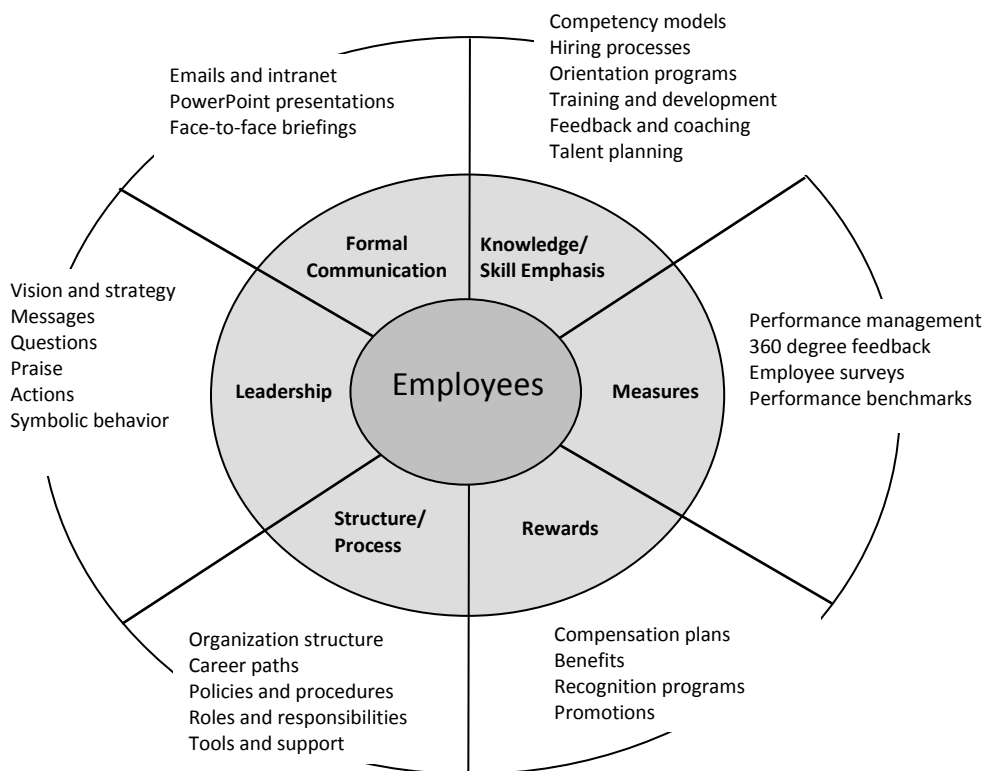
- **Sampling error** occurs whenever you survey a sample instead of the full population. It’s affected by the number of survey respondents and calculated by a statistical formula. As such, sampling error is often the only source of error that’s reported.
- **Coverage error** occurs when some members of the target population have no chance or a reduced chance of being surveyed – and these individuals differ from respondents with respect to the items being measured.
- **Non-response error** occurs when members of the selected sample do not complete, or only partially complete, the survey – and these individuals differ from respondents with respect to the items being measured.
- **Measurement error** occurs when a survey response deviates from the truth. This happens when, for instance, a respondent misreads a question or wants to provide a socially desirable answer. Or it could be the result of a poorly worded question or the order in which questions are asked.

## How Organizations Communicate

When planning employee communication, consider the big picture:

- **Formal communication** helps build awareness and understanding.
- **Leaders** influence employee perceptions by their words and actions.
- **HR processes** reinforce and reward the adoption of desired behaviors.

In practice, this means that all the elements in the graphic below, from the praise leaders offer to performance benchmarks to employee career paths, can send powerful messages about what’s truly important to the organization. Formal communication – the kind found on the intranet, conveyed in speeches, suggested in manager talking points – is just one part of the message.



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