

Communication Brief

Employee communication tips and ideas

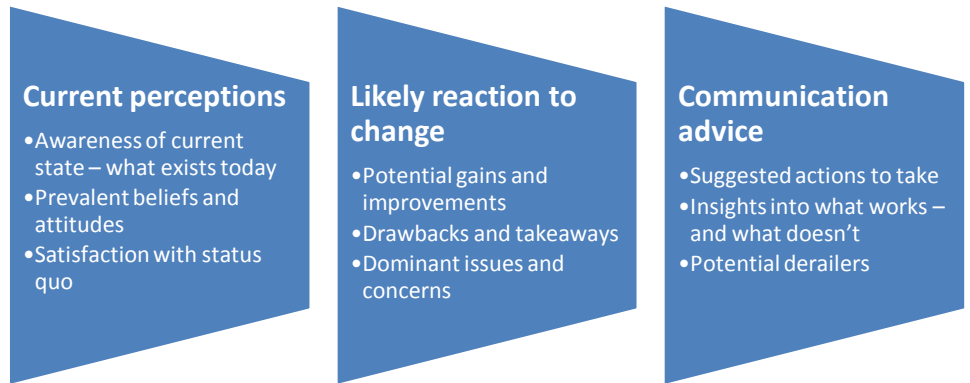
What's Wrong with Open-Ended Survey Questions?

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 accurately reflect opinions. So why would survey methodologists advise against using 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. People's written comments, however, can be vague, making the coding process subjective and introducing added measurement error.
- **Requires verbal ability** – People differ in their capacity to articulate their opinions in words. Someone might be knowledgeable about a topic, but clumsy at expressing himself. Others can be facile with words but lack meaningful insights. Open-ended questions confound people's verbal ability with their opinions.
- **Often skipped** – It takes more time to craft a reply to a question than it does to check a box on a scale. As a result, people are prone to skipping open-ended questions, providing no data at all. This could lead you to base your conclusions on feedback from a small subset of the sample – a subset that may hold different attitudes than others you surveyed.

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:



Current perceptions

- Awareness of current state – what exists today
- Prevalent beliefs and attitudes
- Satisfaction with status quo

Likely reaction to change

- Potential gains and improvements
- Drawbacks and takeaways
- Dominant issues and concerns

Communication advice

- Suggested actions to take
- Insights into what works – and what doesn't
- Potential derailers

Example: Introducing a new sales force incentive plan

Stakeholder	Impact of Change	Current Perceptions	Likely Reaction	Communication Advice
Sales Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More pay at risk • Must learn and convey new incentive plan • Need to have tough discussions about pay with low performers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think current plan is simple and straightforward • Believe current plan generally works well, but recognize its shortcomings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I might earn less - Plan might demotivate good performers - Plan may strengthen pay for performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare one-page overview describing how new plan works • Train managers to have pay discussions
Salespeople	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Might earn different level of pay depending on results achieved • Changed performance objectives and metrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledgeable about current plan and mostly satisfied with it • Low performers like current plan more than high performers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly negative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I might earn less - I need to understand how the new plan will affect me - I'll have new accountabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold one-on-one meetings with manager to review implications • Conduct town hall meeting with leadership team
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help managers implement new plan • Coach salespeople and answer questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believe current plan reinforces wrong behaviors • Believe current plan poorly differentiates pay for performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly positive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan may strengthen pay for performance - Plan promotes HR involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare HR briefing deck, talking points and Q&A • Hold HR conference calls