DUAL-RESPONSE SURVEYS

Purpose

The purpose of conducting dual-response surveys is to collect information from a large number of people—typically located in multiple locations—regarding their perspectives on both current and desired performance.

Needs Assessment Applications

Surveys are commonly used for needs assessments, but many types of surveys are available to you. The dual-response survey might be a new tool for you to consider. Surveys can be useful tools for needs assessments because they are relatively easy to develop, their data usually can be clearly transformed into useful information, and surveys (especially web-based ones) can easily be distributed to both large and small groups. Because surveys can require less time to complete than interviews or focus groups, and because they can be sent to people at other locations, they are often used in needs assessments (as well as in needs analyses).

Whereas the traditional single-response survey is a data collection tool used in a variety of organizational activities—such as opinion polling and evaluation—the dual-response survey format provides significant benefits over traditional single-response tools in completing a needs assessment. The dual-response survey, as presented here, collects information regarding both the *current* and *desired* performance, thereby providing clear data regarding the size, direction, and relative priority of performance gaps (or needs). This type of survey gives you more options for analyzing data than does its single-response counterpart, and it provides valuable information that is essential to the unique goals of a needs assessment.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages

- A needs assessment survey allows you to capture the perspectives of multiple groups on a variety of performance-related topics.
- The dual-response format allows the needs assessment survey to simultaneously capture data regarding both the current and the desired levels of performance. Too often needs assessments assume that the desired performance is known and agreed upon by everyone in the organization when in reality this assumption is rarely the case.
- The dual-response format gives you multiple ways to view, analyze, and report on findings, including the size of the needs, the direction of the needs, and the relative priority that participants associate with the needs.
- Surveys offer a variable format where you can ask a few questions or many questions, and likewise you can ask open-ended or closed-ended questions.

Disadvantages

- Survey data are frequently confused with performance data. It is important to remember that survey data rely on the perceptions of those completing the survey. Thus, while a respondent may indicate that his or her perception is that performance is high, the reality may be that performance is low. Nevertheless, knowing the perceptions of those participating in the needs assessment is essential to making informed decisions.
- Many organizations frequently use surveys; as a result, employees can get "burned out" on completing surveys. This reaction can reduce your response rate, increase the number of respondents who complete only part of the survey, or otherwise compromise the integrity of your survey results.
- Surveys do not give you the opportunity to ask follow-up questions to respondents (unlike interviews or focus groups).
- Although surveys may seem easy to prepare, they are often developed poorly. Therefore, it is important to have an experienced survey developer involved in the process of developing a survey, assisting in survey development, determining the survey analysis approach, or reviewing the survey.

Process Overview

1. Drawing from the list of information required for the needs assessment, create a list of the information that you expect to gain from the needs assessment survey. The focus of developing an effective needs assessment survey should always be on the information required to make decisions. This focus will prevent you from asking questions that don't get used in subsequent decision making. (For helpful sample templates to serve as job aids, see pages 125–126.)

2. Create your needs assessment survey for a target audience. Also, consider using multiple versions of a survey to target different audiences or stakeholders. Surveys frequently are best used to collect information from a larger number of people than you would potentially invite for an interview or a focus group.

3. Identify questions to include in your needs assessment. Questions should focus on results and performance, rather than on what resources or changes participants may want. In the Tips for Writing Good Survey Questions section of this tool are many ideas on how to write successful survey questions.

4. Create the survey using the dual-response format. Multiple sections within a single survey can also use different response scales—you simply must clearly communicate those differences to the survey respondents. Table 3A.1. provides examples of three types of rating scales: agreement, satisfaction, and frequency. You can change the associated responses with each level of the Likert-type scales to represent appropriate responses for the questions in your assessment (see example in table 3A.1).

5. Pilot test your survey with participants who are representative of your target audience. When participants have completed the draft survey, calculate the results to ensure that you can use the information attained from each question. Typically, responses to some questions do not provide the useful information you were looking for; thus, changes must be made to the survey.

6. Needs assessment surveys can be done in a variety of formats and media depending on the target audience. Web surveys can easily be created, distributed, and analyzed using Internet-based survey systems. Paper-based surveys can also be effective, especially if members of your target audience may not have access to technology or have the computer skills necessary for completing an online survey. Select the format that you believe

Table 3A.1 Examples of Different Rating Scales

Agreement: *1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree*

Current performance	Survey question	Desired or optimal performance
① ② ③ ④ ⑤	Does the subway usually get me to where I am going on time?	① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Satisfaction: *1 = Very Dissatisfied; 2 = Dissatisfied; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Satisfied; 5 = Very Satisfied*

Current performance	Survey question	Desired or optimal performance
① ② ③ ④ ⑤	What is my overall satisfaction with the subway service provided by the city?	① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Frequency: *1 = Daily; 2 = Weekly (3–6 times per week); 3 = Occasionally (3–6 times per month); 4 = Sometimes (less than 3 times per month); 5 = Rarely (once a month to never)*

Current performance	Survey question	Desired or optimal performance
① ② ③ ④ ⑤	Does the subway have mechanical failures during my trips?	① ② ③ ④ ⑤

will give you the highest return rate of completed surveys. Ideally, you would want at least 50 percent (often more) of the surveys you send out to be completed. The higher the return rate, the more confidence you can have that your survey results represent the perspectives of the target audience. For national level, highly sensitive, or other important needs assessments, you will want to consult with a statistician about minimum response rates.

7. The data from a dual-response needs assessment can be analyzed using four analysis approaches—discrepancy, direction, position, and demographic differences—to inform decision making. See table 3A.2 for an example of responses from a single survey taker. See table 3A.3 to review how this survey taker's responses would be analyzed using the four analysis approaches.

Analysis 1: Discrepancy

For each question of the needs assessment survey, you should perform a gap analysis by subtracting the value assigned to the *current* column from

Table 3A.2 Example of a Completed Survey

Instructions: Indicate your level of agreement with the survey questions below. Note that desired or optimal performance ratings should be taken in consideration of costs (financial, and other costs) associated with achieving optimal performance. Therefore, take care to avoid giving all responses a rating of 5. (Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree)

Current performance	Survey question	Desired or optimal performance
① ❷ ③ ④ ⑤	a. Does the subway usually get me to where I am going on time?	① ② ③ ❹ ⑤
① ② ③ ❹ ⑤	b. Does the subway station have an adequate number of employees at each station to serve my needs?	① ② ❸ ④ ⑤
❶ ② ③ ④ ⑤	c. Can the subway audio system be heard easily in all train cars?	① ② ❸ ④ ⑤
① ❷ ③ ④ ⑤	d. Is the subway system operated safely?	① ② ③ ④ ❺

the value assigned to the *desired* column (see table 3A.2). The results of this analysis will identify discrepancies between the *current* and *desired* performance for each variable associated with the performance system. The size of the gap can provide valuable information in determining the perceived acuteness of the need or the extent to which opportunities can be capitalized upon.

The results of this analysis are, however, necessary rather than sufficient for quality decision making. Alone, these results provide only isolated values (data points) that must be put into context through their relationships with the three other analysis approaches.

Analysis 2: Direction

For each question, the positive or negative value of the gap should be identified to differentiate needs (when desired is greater than current) from opportunities (when *what is* (WI) is greater than *what should be* (WSB).

- Positive discrepancies between *desired* and *current* (for example, desired = 5, current = 3, gap = 2 identifies a **need**.
- Negative discrepancies between *desired* and *current* (for example, *desired* = 3, *current* = 4, gap = –1) identifies an **opportunity** (for instance, to reallocate resources).

Table 3A.3 Example of an Analysis of the Completed Survey

Instructions for the survey analyst: For each item, tabulate the gap size by subtracting the current performance from the desired performance. Gap direction will be determined by whether the difference between desired and current performance is positive, negative, or neutral. Once this direction is determined, indicate in the next cells whether the response represents (a) a need, opportunity, or neither and (b) whether the position or priority in addressing the need or opportunity is low, medium, or high. The "analyst comments" column is to be used for summarizing the lengthier comments by the respondent. The example in the table provides analysis for one single respondent, but usually there are many more respondents. Thus, analyzing and aggregating results on a computer spreadsheet is advised.

Survey question	Gap size: ***desired – current performance*** Gap direction: ***positive = need; negative = opportunity***	Need or opportunity	Position or priority	Analyst comments
a. Does the subway usually get me to where I am going on time?	+2	*Need*	Medium	The respondent recommends a reduction in schedule delays. (+2 points: need)
b. Does the subway station have an adequate number of employees at each station to serve my needs?	–1	*Opportunity*	Low	There may be an opportunity to reduce the number of employees at stations during nonpeak hours. (–1 point: opportunity)
c. Can the subway audio system be heard easily in all train cars?	+2	*Need*	Medium	The respondent noted difficulties in hearing the conductor. (+2 points: need).
d. Is the subway system operated safely?	+3	*Need*	High	The respondent indicated a problem with proper door closing during crowded periods. Safety hazard—requires immediate attention. (+3 points: need)

The distinction between needs and opportunities provides a context for discrepancy data, which by itself illustrates only the size of the gap between *current* and *desired* performance. By examining the direction of the discrepancy, decision makers can consider which gaps illustrate needs that have the potential to be addressed through organizational efforts and which gaps identify opportunities that the organization may want to leverage (or maintain) to ensure future success.

Analysis 3: Position (that is, relative priority)

The position analysis illustrates the relative importance or priority of discrepancies from the perspective of the respondents. Although many gaps between *WSB* and *WI* may have equivalent discrepancies and may be in the same direction, the position of the discrepancy on the Likert scale of the instrument can demonstrate the relative priority of the discrepancy in relation to other gaps.

For example, two needs may be identified with a discrepancy of +3, but the first need illustrated a gap between WSB = 5 and WI = 2, whereas the second need illustrated a gap between WSB = 3 and WI = 0. As a result, the interpretation of these discrepancies in relation to each other would indicate a perceived prioritization of the first need over the second. This information can be valuable in selecting which discrepancies are addressed when resources are limited.

Together, three types of analysis (discrepancy, direction, and position) can offer valuable data for identifying and prioritizing needs.

Analysis 4: Demographic Differences (optional)

You may want to view the results of your needs assessment survey on the basis of demographic differences (for example, division, location, position type, or years of experience). Analysis of the results can be reviewed by demographic variables if items related to the desired demographic categories are added to the instrument. If your organization has collected data regarding the demographics of respondents to the survey, then you should complete an analysis for *discrepancy*, *direction*, and *position* for each demographic on a section, subsection, or item basis, depending on the level of information required for decision making.

Tips for Success

- An abundance of literature exists about survey development, implementation, and analysis. Developing surveys is not as easy as it may seem, so consult survey literature and survey developers when preparing your survey.

- You should pilot test any survey questions with representatives from the target audience.
- Before releasing your survey, plan ahead on how you will analyze the results.
- If you have diverse audiences, you should not try to write one survey that fits all audiences.
- You must plan to follow up with participants who have not completed the survey after a few days so you can remind them of the importance of their participation.
- If you must have survey results from an important stakeholder group to be able to make informed decisions, you should oversample that group to ensure that you get enough responses. In other words, if you want 50 returned surveys, then you would send out 200 surveys to the group in hopes of getting at least a 25 percent response rate rather than sending out 100 surveys with hopes of getting a 50 percent response rate.

Tips for Writing Good Survey Questions

- Ensure a common understanding.
- Start with the more interesting questions for the audience.
- Don't try to impress participants with big words.
- Don't write leading questions.
- Avoid double negatives or questions with multiple meanings.
- Stay focused: don't ask more questions than you require for making decisions.
- Put your questions in a logical order (for example, use sections or topic area headlines to organize questions).
- Verify that questions make sense for both response columns (current and desired).
- Don't let your survey get too long (for example, it should take participants no more than 15 minutes to complete).

References and Resources

Altschuld, James W. 2010. *Needs Assessment Phase III: Collecting Data* (Book 3 of *Needs Assessment Kit*). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Altschuld, James W., and J. N. Eastmond Jr. 2010. *Needs Assessment Phase I: Getting Started* (Book 2 of *Needs Assessment Kit*). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kaufman, Roger, Ingrid Guerra-López, Ryan Watkins, and Doug Leigh. 2008. *The Assessment Book: Applied Strategic Thinking and Performance Improvement Through Self-Assessments*. Amherst, MA: HRD Press.

Websites

An inexpensive and easy-to-use survey development and deployment tool can be found at http://www.surveymonkey.com.

Another site that offers complete online survey services, including the development, deployment, and analysis of dual response and traditional surveys, is at http://www.evaluationsolutions.com.

Samples of Job Aids

Survey Template

Satisfaction Scale: *1 = Very Dissatisfied; 2 = Dissatisfied; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Satisfied; 5 = Very Satisfied*

Sample Instructions: Indicate your level of agreement with the survey questions in the table. Note that desired or optimal performance ratings should be taken in consideration of costs (financial and other costs) associated with achieving optimal performance. Therefore, take care to avoid giving all responses a rating of 5. (Scale: *1 = Very Dissatisfied; 2 = Dissatisfied; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Satisfied; 5 = Very Satisfied*)

Current performance	Survey question	Desired or optimal performance
①②③④⑤	a.	①②③④⑤
①②③④⑤	b.	①②③④⑤
①②③④⑤	c.	①②③④⑤

Analysis Template

Instructions for the survey analyst: For each item, tabulate the gap size by subtracting the current performance from the desired performance. Gap direction will be determined by whether the difference between desired and current performance is positive, negative, or neutral. Once this direction is determined, indicate in the next cells whether the response represents (a) a need, opportunity, or neither and (b) whether the position or priority in addressing the need or opportunity is low, medium, or high. The "analyst comments" column is to be used for summarizing the lengthier comments by the respondent. The example in the table provides analysis for one single respondent, but usually there are many more respondents. Thus, analyzing and aggregating results on a computer spreadsheet is advised.

Survey question	Gap size: ***desired – current performance*** Gap direction: ***positive = need; negative = opportunity***	Need or opportunity	Position or priority	Analyst comments
a.	0 1 2 3 4 5 Positive or Negative	Need or Opportunity	High Medium Low	
b.	0 1 2 3 4 5 Positive or Negative	Need or Opportunity	High Medium Low	
c.	0 1 2 3 4 5 Positive or Negative	Need or Opportunity	High Medium Low	