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contents

ORGANISATIONAL SURVEYS AS A
TOOL FOR CHANGE

BY ELLEN MARTINS AND PROF. NICO MARTINS

PART TWO A CASE STUDY

IN PART ONE WE DISCUSSED THE PROCESS OF CONDUCTING AN ORGANI-SATIONAL SURVEY. IN THIS ARTICLE THE FOCUS WILL BE ON THE RESULTS OF SUCH A SURVEY. For many businesses, the current environment is one of increased international competition, slower growth rates, various changes and declining employee and customer satisfaction.

EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION AND PROFITS

According to research, Schneider (1991) drew the conclusion that "frequently", but not always, employee data are reflected in unit profitability. Paradise–Tornow (1991) concluded that overall employee satisfaction was positively related to financial performance measures. Satisfied employees, one could argue, should be more motivated and harder working than dissatisfied ones. This effort should be reflected in the company's performance. According to Furnham and Gunter (1993), an organisational climate survey is the cheapest and most efficient way of obtaining the required information, especially in organisations with more than 50 employees. According to Furnham and Gunter (1993) organisational climate is a relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of an organistion that (a) is experienced by its members, (b) influences their behaviour and (c) can be described in terms of the values of a particular set of characteristics (or attributes) of the organisation.

AN ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE SURVEY

In 1998 a major company in South Africa embarked on an organisational climate study. The main purpose of the study was to determine whether employees perceive their work environment positively or negatively. The results of the survey subsequently showed some positive and some negative perceptions. Management decided to implement some of the recommendations and re-do the audit after ± 12 months. The second audit was thus conducted after 14 months.

THE PURPOSE WAS FORMULATED AS FOLLOWS:
> Is the business managed effectively?
> Do the employees understand the company's mission and goals and its implementation?
> Are the management and interpersonal processes perceived positively or negatively by employees?
> Do the technology, task systems and job satisfaction support the mission?
> What is the impact of interventions on the climate since the 1998 audit?

THE ORGANISATIONAL PROCESS

The same questionnaire that was used in 1998 was distributed to employees for completion in the second audit. The survey included a qualitative phase of focus groups, and a quantitative phase involving the climate survey instrument, which also included open-ended questions for comments. In the survey, each individual allocated a score to each question on the basis of his/her response to the question.

THE FOLLOWING SCALE WAS USED:
Strongly agree 1 Disagree 2 Unsure 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOCUSED ON THE FOLLOWING MAIN DIMENSIONS:
> mission and goals;
> technology;
> task systems;
> management processes;
> interpersonal and social processes;
> external environment;
> employment equity;
> job satisfaction; and
> factors of importance why employees came to the company and factors that will influence their decisions to stay with the company.

TYPICAL STATEMENTS WERE:
> I personally agree with the company's mission;
> I get along well with my immediate supervisor/manager;
> I am satisfied with the way that work performance is evaluated;
> I feel positive about my future in the company; and
> The resources I use to carry out my work are sufficient.

An interactive model of organisational climate (figure 1) was used to interpret and understand the information. The data was captured, analysed and compared with the 1998 results using the Survey Tracker software package, which is ideal for organisational surveys. The software package not only analyses data in means and frequencies, but also produces excellent graphs and tables. Furthermore results can also be compared statistically - T-test, test of variance, etc.

Results of the 2000 audit indicated that the results were either perceived more positively or on the same levels as in 1998. Two of the dimensions (interpersonal and social processes and technology, as well as a number of statements) were now evaluated significantly more positively than in 1998.

THE MOST POSITIVE SUB-DIMENSIONS WERE:
> responsibility;
> skills and abilities;
> feelings; and
> leadership.

THE LOWEST RANKED SUB-DIMENSIONS WERE (AS IN 1998):
> remuneration;
> coordination and control; and
> communication.

The highest ranked statements showed that more than 90% of the employees agreed that the following aspects were positive:

satisfaction as well as overall productivity and organisational performance will improve.

These results clearly indicate that a well conducted survey has numerous positive advantages for an organisation. The company intends to conduct another climate audit in ± 12 months to monitor the next phase of interventions as well as the impact on overall organisational performance.

IMPORTANT INSIGHTS TO EMERGE FROM THE TWO SURVEYS WERE (ALSO SEE WALTERS, 1999):

> Involve employees in all change processes.
> Use interviews, focus groups (qualitative research) and questionnaires (quantitative research) in the research process.
> Preserve confidentiality at all times.
> Use professional assistance to design the questionnaire and manage the survey process.
> Keep managers informed throughout the process – it is they who will have to act on the survey results.
> Give feedback of the results to all stakeholders.

The purpose of the audit as initially formulated by the project team was supported by the results of the climate audit, namely the business is managed effectively, that employees are satisfied with most of the climate dimensions and that most of the interventions had a positive impact on the organisational climate.

The benefits of an organisational climate are summarised as follows by Furnham and Gunter (1993): "A climate audit or survey is nearly always found to be a very useful management tool, providing clear, explicit data on employee attitudes, benefits, and behaviours". **HR**f   **ELLEN MARTINS IS A DIRECTOR OF ORGANISATIONAL DIAGNOSTICS AND PROF. NICO MARTINS IS PROFESSOR OF INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY AT UNISA AND HEAD OF UNISA'S CENTRE OF INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY. EMAIL: nicellen@iafrica.com**

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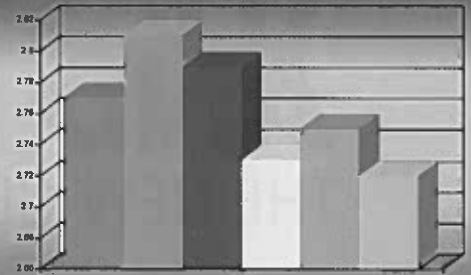
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