

## Measuring the Safety Climate of Your Organization



Safety climate is the mood of an organization based on what workers are experiencing at a specific time. That snapshot of safety can change quickly, depending on whether a new procedure has been implemented or if an incident has occurred.

To measure safety climate, organizations can hold team discussions or conduct an employee survey. Consider the following when administering a safety climate survey:

- Is a survey the best way to consult with workers given your company size?
- How will you encourage employees to take the survey?
- Will employees feel comfortable expressing themselves honestly?
- How will you deliver the survey to employees?
- Are there privacy and confidentiality provisions you need to comply with?
- Who will coordinate and support the survey process?
- What response rate is acceptable for your business?
- What data safety requirements are you following?

### Sample survey questions

Questions on a safety climate survey can have different sections for employees' perceptions of safety and their perception of the safety approach of managers/supervisors.

Ask employees to indicate their opinion—strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree—about the following statements:

1. I care about my personal safety at work.
2. I care about the safety of my coworkers.
3. I consider minor accidents to be a normal part of our daily work.
4. I accept minor accidents to be a normal part of our daily work.
5. I have great trust in my coworkers' abilities to ensure safety.
6. I feel that safety rounds/evaluations have no effect on safety.
7. I consider safety training to be meaningless or nonexistent.
8. I rarely talk about safety at work.
9. I generally feel safety when working with others at work.
10. I have witnessed others break safety rules in order to complete work on time.

There's a comment box if they wish to elaborate. The next section is about managers or supervisors and safety.

1. Management seems to care about my safety.
2. Workers' safety practices are very important to management.
3. Workers are regularly made aware of dangerous work practices or conditions.

4. Workers are regularly praised for safe conduct.
5. Workers receive instructions on safety when hired.
6. Management looks for causes, not guilty persons, when an accident occurs.
7. Fear of sanctions (negative consequences) from management discourages employees here from reporting near-miss accidents.
8. Management strives for everybody at the worksite to have high competence concerning safety and risks.
9. Management never considers employees' suggestions regarding safety.
10. Management encourages employees here to work in accordance with safety rules—even when the work schedule is tight.

The last section allows open responses to the question: What are your three biggest safety concerns at work?

## **Steps to conduct a safety climate survey**

### **Step 1: Get management support**

Before you can start the survey, you need to get support from leadership: senior managers, middle managers, and frontline leaders. One way to do this is make a business case that shows how measuring and improving safety climate can lead to substantial return on investment.

Another way to gain support is to align the survey with management obligations regarding due diligence and keeping staff informed about health and safety issues.

### **Step 2: Have a communications strategy**

A successful safety climate survey should get a response rate of 60% or more. To get a high response rate, it's important to communicate the purpose of the survey and encourage employees to participate.

Some ways to get the word out about the survey include:

- Pre-survey information pack
- Toolbox talk discussion by a supervisor
- Poster or flyer
- Invitation and reminder emails
- Results summary handouts

When putting together the information about the survey, you should:

- Keep information concise and to the point
- Use plain language
- Use email subject lines that ask workers for their help or advice
- Send survey communications from the highest level of the organization

- Reach out to people across the company to get reactions to the communications and remove any barriers (e.g., no access to a computer)
- Use positive and thankful language in all survey invitation and reminder messages
- Explain the reason for doing the survey, including the company vision, mission, or values
- Ensure leaders at all levels actively promote the survey during team meetings
- Include language that states confidentiality will be maintained

### **Step 3: Develop a survey delivery plan**

Develop a plan that spells out how the survey will be delivered. The first thing to decide is whether the survey should be delivered as a hard copy, online, or both. Delivering it online can save money and time, and there are fewer steps involved to get to the analysis and reporting stages. Some disadvantages of online delivery include the need for technical expertise, it can exclude employees who don't have access to a computer, it's less flexible, and it's usually done by individuals on their own.

A survey delivered as a hard copy can be completed by anyone in any location. There's more control over the look and feel of the survey form, and it can be done readily in groups of all sizes. Disadvantages of a hard copy include the need for manual entry of data before analysis can start, extra time added for data collection, it may add more costs to the project, and may increase anxiety around privacy issues.

It's a good idea to have survey coordinators who can handle the following tasks:

- Obtaining survey materials
- Conducting survey administration with worker groups, including explaining the survey process and answering basic questions
- Encouraging participation from the team
- Collecting completed surveys

### **Step 4: Train survey coordinators**

Survey coordinators should complete the survey themselves before starting the process with other employees. Ensure that they understand and can communicate:

- The purpose and benefits of the survey
- Privacy provisions of the survey
- How to complete the survey
- Who to contact with questions or concerns
- Emphasizing that participation is voluntary, but the survey is a chance for all employees to contribute their experiences working at the company

### **Step 5: Protect employee privacy and confidentiality**

Confidentiality is crucial to ensure that the survey data can be used effectively. It should be maintained via the following actions:

- Apart from any demographic questions, no personal information should be recorded on survey materials.
- Ensure that employees have a private space to complete the survey.
- If hard copy surveys are used, provide employees with either a sealable envelope or sealed collection box for their completed forms.
- Only use the survey in a grouped, non-identifiable way that preserves the anonymity of individuals.