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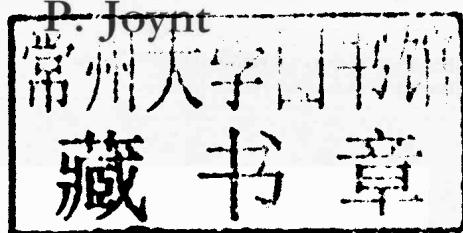
Appraising and Exploring Organisations

Edited by
**S. Tyson,
K. F. Ackermann,
M. Domsch and
P. Joynt**



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Appraising and Exploring Organisations

First published in 1988, this book offers a comprehensive description of the functions and performance of organisational surveys from a wide range of European experts in the field.

The book examines the utility of organisational surveys as a method of research for the social sciences and as a support for employee relations strategies and personnel policies. It looks at the broad question of 'what are the key dimensions of an organisation with which managers and researchers should be concerned?' and at how they can be an essential element in a participative management approach to employee relations. Throughout, the book emphasizes the utility of surveys for the study and understanding of organisations.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

K F Ackermann, M Domsch, P Joynt, A Schneble and
S Tyson

"Man is the measure of all things" Protagoras 481 -
411 BC

This book takes as its subject the process by which organisational life is measured. The techniques adopted for this purpose do not measure things but measure people. At one level, our discussion of organisation survey methods concerns how to discover data about employees through various investigative techniques. However, since it is not possible to have a complete knowledge of human beings, given the complexities of behaviour and relationships, any attempt to measure variables such as employee attitudes, "morale" or feelings is fraught with difficulty. The themes addressed by this book are the appropriate methodologies for studying the varied phenomena of organisational life, the validity of survey techniques, and the value of surveys. In this chapter, we will introduce these themes which recur throughout the book. In addition, any serious discussion of how "facts" are discovered must recognise, as the Hawthorne experiments found so many years ago, that the facts include the behaviour and attitudes of the researchers as well as the researched (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939). Consequently we will at the outset accept the volatile environment of organisation politics, in which meanings are negotiated and acknowledge that results from surveys, however pure the methodology, become a part of the environment being researched.

Organisation surveys are initiated for a variety of reasons. Managers are most likely to want to gather data, but trade unionists, social scientists, government agencies, and market researchers amongst others may also wish to gather information. Our book is aimed primarily at managers and those who study organisations. Managers perhaps have a greater need than others because of the distance that has developed

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between employees and those in control, but they usually also have the power and resources to initiate enquiries. Our reasons for presenting this collection of papers are to assist those who wish to undertake organisation surveys, or to interpret the results, whether they be practising managers, or social scientists, who, like us, are concerned with appraising and exploring organisations.

Accelerating technical and social change causes a growing need for information. On the one hand it is of great importance to be able to describe and interpret exactly the relationships, which result from the behaviour and the cooperation of employees. Only in this way can personnel management shape the working conditions, the organisation structure and climate effectively. On the other hand companies have to scrutinise continuously the organisation's structure to identify weaknesses so they may take corrective action. Organisational surveys can be used to gather all the necessary information, if they are conducted regularly and intensively. In this sense, surveys have to be considered as an integral tool of personnel management.

Surveys can therefore serve the research, analysis and prediction needs of personnel staff. Furthermore surveys can provide the start of an organisational development process, if the results of analysis (for example, into work attitudes, supervisory styles, informal structures and organisational climate) are evaluated and followed by strategies and steps to improve personnel management.

A number of the papers presented here argue that surveys are able to do more than just gather information. One goal of corporate leadership is to satisfy the demand for participation of both the indirect and the direct kind.

Surveys which enable the members of an organisation to express their attitudes anonymously, show one representative picture of the large number of personal views. Each subordinate is able to express his or her opinion of the working situation directly and free of any fear or constraint.

A comparison with the company's marketing policy, where continuous marketing research is conducted outside the organisation shows distinctly that internal market research of the employees is necessary

and meaningful. The subordinates are the "customers" and "partners" in the enterprise. Hence the decisions on necessary action, plans for changes, which concern the employees and their working situation, should be brought about by the corporate leadership, with management and work people acting together. Such an organisational development process can best be achieved by participative decision-making. The employees are the best experts on their work situation.

Surveys as a mechanism for concerted decisions depend upon the following aspects, to become reality:

1. There must be a good opportunity for each employee to express honestly and critically attitudes towards their own work and to the corporate and personnel policy in general.
2. Subsequent to the survey there must be participative decisions on actions and strategies inside the company.
3. Surveys should not contain any form of sanctions.

If these conditions are not realised, surveys are no help for superiors and subordinates as partners, but only provide "pseudo-participation".

We must also recognise that organisation surveys are an important management tool in control terms. Managers are able to deepen and to reconsider their knowledge and understanding of their subordinates' interests and attitudes. After the analysis of the survey and following discussion of the results, managers are able to recognise the degree of work satisfaction, and satisfaction with the management, the corporate goals and policy in general. Regular organisation surveys enable comparison between current and former surveys to be made, so that changes are monitored over a period of time. If changes and improvements are researched and evaluated continuously, there is the possibility of correcting and varying the actions accordingly.

We will now consider the crucial question, how valid are organisation surveys?

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1. Validity and other requirements to surveys

Surveys have to meet special requirements in order to be useful as a human resource management tool. Among these requirements, the following are of outstanding importance: validity and, in addition, reliability and objectivity. They indicate the quality standard of a survey.

In the social sciences, the validity of a test indicates whether and to what extent this test really measures what it should measure (Brandstätter (1970); Attestlander (1975); Mayntz et al. (1978); Kromrey (1980); Töpfer and Zander (1985)).

If a survey is designed as a special test to measure, say, the organisational climate or satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the workers in a company, validity would mean then, that the organisation climate or satisfaction and dissatisfaction are really measured by the underlying questionnaire. Obviously, surveys with low validity could be very misleading as a basis for management decisions. The goal, therefore, is or should be to apply surveys which show high validity.

Another important criterion of the quality standard of a survey is its reliability. In general, reliability indicates how well or badly a specific variable is measured by the test applied. It should be noticed that the reliability of a survey might be high, while at the same time its validity is rather low. However, high reliability is always necessary to reach high validity.

The third quality criterion mentioned above was objectivity. The greater the objectivity, the more its results are independent of the person who has executed the test. Sometimes, objectivity is called "interrater-reliability" and interpreted as a special aspect of reliability. Like all other aspects of reliability high objectivity or interrater reliability is a pre-requisite for high validity.

2. Types of Validity

Several different types of validity need to be distinguished. The main types are: content validity, construct validity and criteria validity.

a) Content Validity

The content validity of a survey derives from the thesis that the survey and its test elements represent the variable which is and should be measured. This thesis is either based on logical considerations or on expert ratings. Therefore, content validity is also called "face validity" or "expert validity."

A survey designed to measure the success of a training course in terms of knowledge increase has content validity if it is proven that the various tasks of the test adequately refer to the training programme (Lienert 1967). Another example of content validity is provided by a survey which is directed to the measurement of work satisfaction and dissatisfaction in a sample of workers. The questions asked in the survey evoke feelings of satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction, which are to be measured (Neuberger 1983). From this point of view, the survey can be said to have content validity.

Most organisational surveys rely heavily on content validity.

b) Construct Validity

Construct validity exists if the survey and its test elements cover the essential characteristics of the theoretical "construct" which is to be measured. The "construct", for example organisational climate, organisational commitment, work satisfaction and dissatisfaction etc., determines the structure of the survey, while survey results may modify the underlying construct.

For constructs like those mentioned above various questionnaires exist which claim more or less construct validity. In these cases, organisational surveys will tend to apply already proven and accepted questionnaires. If no questionnaire exists or reasons require a company-tailored one, the problem is how the construct validity of the newly developed tests can be determined.

Methods to determine construct validity of a survey include (Lienert 1967):

- 1) The correlation of survey results with the results from other surveys applying different

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questionnaires for the measurement of the same construct. High correlations would point to a reasonable construct validity, provided that the comparison surveys are valid themselves.

- 2) The intercorrelation of the individual items used in the questionnaire. As all items are related to the same construct, the intercorrelation coefficients of the variables should be high.
- 3) Analysis of survey results in different samples. Different results should be consistent with the construct under study and the assumptions derived from it.

These and other methods are complementary. There is no measure for the extent of construct validity.

c) Criteria Validity

Criteria validity of a survey exists if this survey and its test elements are closely related with one or several accepted validity criteria. The existing relationship between the survey results and the criteria are mostly measured by correlation coefficients. High (low) correlations indicate high (low) criteria validity. As these correlations are computed on the basis of empirical research data, criteria validity is sometimes called empirical validity as opposed to content and construct validity. The selection of a suitable validity criterion may be a difficult problem. It is solved according to the goals of the respective survey. For example, a survey designed to measure work satisfaction and dissatisfaction of workers might use widely accepted manifestations of satisfaction and dissatisfaction as validity criteria. Such criteria are, for example absenteeism and turnover. The majority of researchers suggest, that decreasing the work satisfaction of workers will increase their absenteeism and turnover. The conclusion then is that a valid survey on work satisfaction should produce results which are negatively correlated with the criteria (absenteeism and/or turnover) on a statistically significant level.

Two types of criteria validity are distinguished: "predictive validity" and "concurrent validity". Predictive validity relates survey results to

future criteria measures. In the example mentioned above, high predictive validity would mean that the survey results on work satisfaction are highly and negatively correlated with the future rate of absenteeism and/or turnover. Concurrent validity relates survey results to criteria measures which are computed in the same time period.

3. How much validity is necessary?

There is no general rule regarding the minimum extent of validity required for a survey. In principle, the greater the validity a survey has, the better for decision-making this will be. However, as we are living in an early stage of organisational survey applications as a management tool, aspiration levels as to the quality standard of such surveys should not be unreasonably high.

The validity of a survey will be restricted to content validity only where the data cannot be measured in quantitative terms and the researcher relies more or less on the result of expert ratings. Construct validity and even more criteria validity are widely neglected in the present company practice of survey applications. The social sciences suggest that a test should be valid to such an extent that its application allows better forecasts than its omission (Leinert 1967). This is also true for organisational surveys. Organisational surveys are at present more often designed for diagnostic than for predictive purposes and their results serve as supplementary information for decision-making in addition to other information. Our conclusion is that surveys might be allowed to have a lower validity than is required in other fields of test applications. Without exaggerating the methodological requirements in regard to test validity, organisational surveys can play an important role as a human resource management tool of the company.

So far in this chapter we have identified the functions, needs and validity of surveys. We will now concentrate on the outcomes and value of surveys.

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The Utility/Value of Surveys

We are specifically interested in what surveys can do for an organisation both in the short-run and the long-run. Performance and productivity improvement are closely related to these outcomes and values, as are such concepts as organisation change, organisation development, organisation dynamics and organisation renewal.

The classic analogy of a driver looking out of the back window while driving not only fits the planning function of management but also the functions connected with surveys. Possibly the most important aspect of surveys is to give managers an idea of where they are. An added plus would be to know where the organisation has been and there are some companies who have begun to use continual surveys in this context. However, most of the organisations we have had contact with still use the single survey.

Value of Surveys

The most important value gained by the use of surveys is the attention that is often given to the task, information, human concern and management matrix. We are well beyond the period where single solutions were taught in management schools and the new trends in management and organisation learning call for a more detailed analysis of the "situation at hand". Surveys can accomplish this, and they often give the organisation the necessary insights to make changes or adjust the course of action before it is too late.

A second value to be gained by survey efforts is the attention to process or "how things are done here". At times managers have a tendency to focus on the new techniques of the day or to go too far with an MIS system, operations research, CAD/CAM, project, or for example in using one technique such as transactional analysis, in training. A survey affords the opportunity to assess the value of some of these techniques as they effect the overall process of management. The process can then be changed and adapted to improve performance and productivity.

A third value involves the attention given to short-run decisions versus long-run planning. Many managers wear blinkers and have a difficult time thinking in the long-run. Surveys often provide the necessary