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Executives, Employees Have Negative Opinions of Employee Surveys

HR and total rewards employees are used to hearing from employees who are tired of their employee surveys and often even insulted by them. Perhaps surprising to HR professionals, “evil” seems to be an actual word used in reference to employee surveys.

Given this reaction to surveys, Theresa Welbourne, Ph.D., adjunct professor of Executive Education at the Ross School of Business, the University of Michigan, in partnership with eePulse, recently conducted a study on the perception of employee and customer surveys in the October Leadership Pulse. HR and non-HR leaders were contacted every two months with a short set of questions.

Participants were asked the degree to which they thought the annual employee survey and customer surveys were “evil,” which was defined as “a situation that is very unpleasant, harmful or morally wrong.”

Most of the 307 respondents did not take the extreme stand that surveys

were evil. However, 11 percent, in fact, did “believe annual employee surveys are evil.”

The group that is most likely to have the highest distaste for surveys has a job function listed as within research and development (not information technology or IT), at 23 percent. Other groups with relatively high scores are engineering at 22 percent, finance and accounting at 20 percent, marketing at 19 percent and manufacturing at 17 percent.

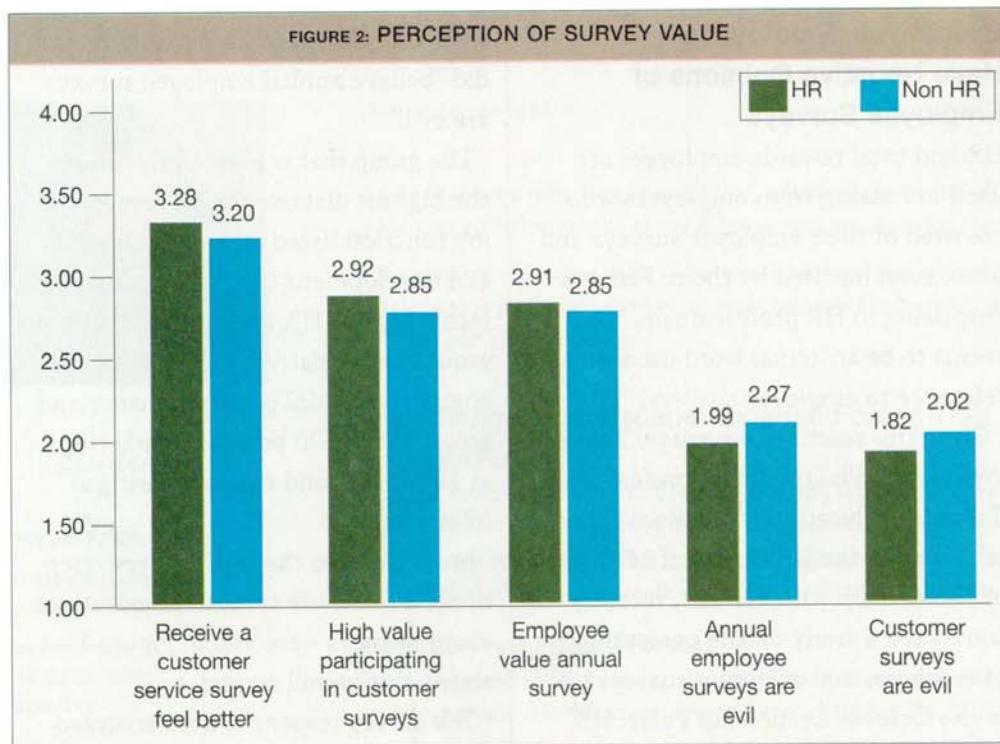
In addition to the “evil” survey questions, a few more traditional questions about surveys were asked. Figure 1 shows the overall responses.

The survey responses were analyzed and categorized as “HR” or “non HR.” Overall, HR respondents (leaders) have more favorable attitudes toward surveys. However, they are not much higher. Considering that HR is the group usually delivering surveys, this is somewhat of a surprise.

Merging data-collection tools (survey technology) with rigorous online dialogue tools can be the next frontier for doing research, for

FIGURE 1: EMPLOYEE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Question	Percent agreeing	Mean (SD)
The annual survey we use at my company is something all employees value.	24%	2.84 (.90)
There is a definite and high ROI from our annual employee survey.	27%	2.82 (.98)
When I receive a customer service survey, I feel much better about the company.	47%	3.21 (.99)
I experience high value from participating in customer surveys.	30%	2.86 (1.05)



knowledge management and for creating and sustaining high involvement or high-performance organizations.

According to Welbourne, “Data and dialogue tools hold great promise in being able to deliver on improving the No. 1 asset any company has—its relationships with stakeholders. I have learned that data and dialogue tools also are incredibly powerful for managing change effectively, integrating new leaders, building brand, changing culture and, in general, improving firm performance very quickly.

“Rather than being ambivalent about surveys, it is time to let the frustrations surface so that true improvements can be made,” she said. “If change happens and we evolve surveys into true leadership tools, there appears to be huge potential in the wins for employees, managers, shareholders and business in general.”

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