

Centering transparency and empathy in employee surveys to build community and generate dialogue

Steve Borrelli, Lana Munip, Leigh Tinik
Penn State University Libraries

Design, methodology, or approach:

Standard introductory elements used to communicate purpose, duration, confidentiality and use of results felt insufficient given the moment.

Once overlooked software features became components of an evolving survey strategy aimed at soliciting sensitive information, promoting community, facilitating empathetic practice, and enabling action, all highly valued by respondents.

Updated practices communicated through a change log integrated in the survey introduction aimed to:

1. enhance transparency
2. address concerns over anonymity
3. allowed for broad real-time sharing of results
4. address concerns expressed by directing responses to leaders closest to personnel to intervene
5. communicate concerns were heard. Summarized results were presented at organization-wide virtual-forums

Findings:

Library personnel appreciated updated practices which allowed for openly sharing personal struggles supported by enhanced practices to maintain anonymity. Respondents reported feeling more connected to peers who were working remotely and on-site. The practice of real-time sharing of responses initially met with concerns over privacy, although this quickly changed to support as the practice was found to provide relief through the realization that many were struggling similarly.

Abstract: When the pandemic began in March of 2020, library personnel transitioned to remote work. Personnel used to working on-site, not only needed to figure out how to work remotely but to learn to live confined to their homes, disconnected from friends and family. For many, the erosion of personal agency amplified feelings of organizational mistrust, illustrated professional inequities, and catalyzed anxieties that typically are not at the forefront of employer concerns.

Libraries responded in part by surveying personnel about their work-related needs and their personal well-being. At Penn State University, the Libraries surveyed all personnel consistently between March 2020 and April 2021, securing over 2,100 responses to questions aimed at identifying workplace challenges, and to better understand and react to supporting personnel needs. This poster discusses survey techniques employed which leveraged the reporting function of Qualtrics and related practices to maintain a **sense of community, communicate organizational empathy, and enable action at the department level while maintaining and building trust in assessment initiatives.**

Respondents reported positive impacts relating to sense of community and organizational empathy resulting from real-time sharing of results and weekly summaries presented at organization-wide forums ensuring administrators heard concerns.

Coupled with department-based reports and transparent practices maintained and built trust in assessment activities while enabling action at the individual level.



Q1.1.

The pandemic created significant workplace challenges across the Penn State University Libraries. For a more full return to the workplace, we would like to understand how we can best support you during this time. If you would like to contribute input, please complete this survey which may take up to 15 minutes to complete.

We will ask you for some high-level demographic information to help us take appropriate follow-up action based on your input. Responses will be analyzed by Library Assessment and shared with the [Safe Return to Work group](#), Library Administrators and supervisors to enable appropriate follow-up. [A list of supervisors who will see responses](#) is available. We also encourage you to speak to your supervisor about specific questions, suggestions, and concerns.

A subset of questions include a label indicating that responses will appear in a publicly available report. If you choose to include identifiable information in responses to these questions, it will appear in the report. Beginning with the May 2021 administration, [a change log has been added to improve survey](#)

We appreciate your open and honest feedback and will make meaningful and impactful adjustments as we evolve.

Contact Steve Borrelli, smb96@psu.edu with questions.

Q1.5. Which department do you work in?

Library Assessment Programs

Department	University Park Contacts
Access Services	Meg Massey
Acquisitions Services	Julia Proctor
Adaptive Technology and Services	Meg Massey
Annex	Verne Neff; Meg Massey
Bindery	Sue Kellerman
Business	Diane Zabel
Business Office	Courtney Dillon
Cataloging and Metadata Services	Ann Copeland
Center for Black Digital Research	Lauren Cooper
Collection Maintenance	Verne Neff; Meg Massey
Collections Services	Julia Proctor
Development and Alumni Relations	Bob Darrah
Facilities Planning and Maintenance	Rick Riccardio
Global Engagement Initiatives	Mark Mattson; Chris Avery
Human Resources	Rob Harris
Humanities and Social Sciences	Norany Schlotzhauer
Inactive Records Center	Curtis Hill
Interlibrary Loan	Mallory Wittig; Meg Massey
Knowledge Commons	Joe Fennewald

Q12 - What action, if any, could your immediate supervisor/manager take that would have the most impact on your efforts to adapt to organizational changes?

Participate in informal virtual meetings and conversations. 96 Responses

My immediate manager has been very supportive of my efforts to adapt to organizational changes.

none

Note: I have no problems, other than irritation about having to wear a mask. And I wish some doors and elevators were operational.

none that haven't already been implemented

A little more direct communication about day to day activities and changes -- it has been good but I still feel disconnected.

Nothing-the time management understanding has been incredible and I find our team may be even more productive remotely than in office.

Supervisor has been great. Appreciate when they voice their frustrations with organizational changes because it

subset of questions include a label indicating that responses will appear in a publicly available report. If you choose to include identifiable information in responses to these questions, it will appear in the report. Beginning with the May 2021 administration, [a change log has been added to improve survey](#)

Changes made to the instrument before May 2021 administration (21.05.08)

- Introduction updated to link to change log and Safe Return to Work member to [enhance transparency](#) and assist with anonymity concerns.
- Question numbers updated to accommodate updates to instruments
 - This change question number of existing questions. Comparisons across time periods should include a verification of question alignment
- Free response question text boxes updated to be reactive to length of response where possible
 - Thank you to the respondent who noted the issue in the April administration
- Q1.4 What campus do you work at?
 - This question has been made optional to accommodate anonymity
- Updates to improve the instrument and experience for those who primarily work on-site include:
 - Display logic applied such that questions regarding concerns about returning to library facilities are not asked to those who indicate that "the majority of my work is on-site at a work location" in Q1.3
 - This update omits Qs 4.5-4.10, based on the response to Q1.3
 - New question block added to solicit the experiences of those already working on-site, based on response to Q1.3
 - (New Question) 5.1 We'd like to know a little more about your recent on-site work experience.
 - (New Question) 5.2 What have been some of the more positive aspects about working on-site? (Results of this question will be shared in the public report)
 - (New Question) 5.3 What challenges do you continue to encounter in your on-

