

**Communications—continued**

**Communicate What?**

If a huge order is placed or cancelled, if government edict limits prices or hours of work or wages, if a supplier furnishes unusable material, or if the employee of a utility march off the job, the result is personal not only to the vice president of sales, not merely to the purchasing agent, but often to the entire body of employees. Lay-offs, stabilization of wage payments, unscheduled changes in the production program—all those and more result, and closely affect sweepers and superintendents alike. And yet, the superintendents, who must take the action, are told the reasons in detail while the operators, also affected by the action taken, are presumed to either not be entitled to know, or to be able to learn from outside sources. What is the answer? It is a difficult one, and its application must rely

upon the ability of management to accurately determine where the fine line of distinction lays between what the body of employees should know, and how much, frankly, it is "safe" to tell them.

That is a problem which will be treated later, and which must ordinarily be solved individually. We now are more concerned with what constitutes the body of information which should be presumed to be general knowledge. Without discussing degrees or amounts, it seems logical that we might assume that the following rule of thumb may apply: All those who earn wages should have a right to know what provides those wages, and the probability as well as the reasons whether or not they might be decreased, continue at the present rate, or be increased in the future. What does this include?

**"Employee Attitude Survey"**

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I believe it is safe to say that there has been an interest in the subject of employee attitude surveys for nearly twenty years, but the interest has been much greater than the application. Perhaps the best that can be said is that there is a growing minority of companies that are having surveys made, either through the services of some outside agency, through cooperation with universities and colleges, or by their own staff. The National Industrial Conference Board reports that a survey of some 3,500 companies showed that about 7% of the reporting companies have utilized attitude surveys.

Clarence Francis, chairman of the board of General Foods Corp., makes this statement, "I realize that there was a time when any employer who so much as advocated an interest in employee attitudes, would have been cried down as a softy, a Santa Claus, a namby-pamby, a Pollyanna, a wet nurse, or what you will. Today, no one of us should fear to stand up on his hind legs and proclaim that improved employee attitudes can be vindicated

on a business basis in terms of cold hard dollars and cents."

The late J. David Houser and the men who were associated with him are generally credited with having made the first *systematic* surveys of employee attitudes in the early 1920's. The first such employee attitude survey results to appear in print, to the best of my knowledge, was in 1925, reported by William A. Durgin, Director of Public Relations of the Commonwealth Edison Company, at a meeting of The Association of Edison Illuminating Companies. Houser himself described the method briefly in his book, "What the Employer Thinks," in 1926.

**Early Surveys**

In most of his early studies, Houser used personal interviews with about 10% of the employees, selected from various departments to secure a representative sample in terms of work groups, age, and length of service. The questions covered some 20 factors, classified under five major headings: Adjustment to Job;

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Supervision; Incentive; Working Conditions and Facilities; Participation - Expression. Answers were scored on five-point rating scales. Interviewers were provided with typical employee responses, secured in preliminary interviewing, for the various levels of the scale. The summarized results were described as "organization attitude indicating morale."

Following the set interview employees were given a deck of 20 cards, each naming and defining one of the factors covered in the questioning, and were asked to rank them (or as many as they could) in order of their importance to the employee. It was interesting to note that these early studies, made largely for public utilities and department stores, were concerned more with public relations and the improvement of public contacts than with the promotion of better personnel relations within the company. In other words the former was the end and the latter the means. Then, as now, business was more interested in its customers than in its employees.

As part of the program for improving public relations, the actual or potential customers of the public utilities and department stores were interviewed on their opinions about and reactions to the various phases of the service which they were getting. It was soon discovered that the reactions of the public were dependent upon the performance of those employees who met the public. The next logical step was to observe the performance of the employees in their dealings with customers (often described as "service shopping"). It was soon realized that the way in which the employees met the public and how they served the public was determined to a large measure by their own attitudes toward the company and the company's policies. So the next natural step was to investigate the attitudes of the employees. The first emphasis was therefore placed on studies of the attitudes of the people who contacted the public. It was only natural, however, that the attitudes of the "behind the scenes" employees were also important in determining the service which the public was getting.

Statistical treatment of results was difficult. Properly trained interviewers were necessary.

And there was the sampling problem; the overall results might be representative as well as the findings for the larger departments, but responses could not be tabulated separately for the smaller work units.

The next step was to experiment with the printed questionnaire. These, consisting almost entirely of true-false statements and yes-no questions, were administered in group meetings in a broad way in 1928. As might be expected difficulties were encountered with the yes-no items and the natural step was to expand these into multiple choice items.

**Types of Surveys**

Before describing in detail this last development, it might be well to list briefly the various methods now in use in making attitude or opinion surveys. You can divide the methods roughly into two types, the personal interview and the self-administering questionnaire. The personal interviews might be made "on the job" where the employee is called from his work for a time to meet with the interviewer and discuss his various opinions about his job in the company. Or it might be a personal interview off the job at his own home. A number of so-called community surveys often have as a part of their purpose the getting of opinions of workers away from the job by either selecting a number of the employees to be included in the sample or simply by depending upon a cross section of the community to furnish a sufficient number of employees of that particular company to secure some idea as to how the employees feel. The personal interview may be a wholly unguided one where the interviewer simply listens to the employee, perhaps stimulating him a little now and then, but letting the employee speak as freely as he wants to on whatever subject is uppermost in his mind. Then there is the guided interview where the interviewer tries to direct the employee along certain lines in the discussion. Or you may have the personal interview with the rigid questionnaire which becomes rather necessary when you are interviewing the employee off the job.

Among the self-administering questionnaires, you have the essay type of questionnaire using

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questions with open ends and letting the employee answer in his own words. There are the yes-no questions, and the true-false statements, and one might mention the Thurstone attitude scale technique in which the statements are listed with instructions to check only those with which the person agrees. Each one of these statements may be weighed in terms of the combined judgment of a group of judges and an attitude score can be gotten by summarizing the values of the statements which have been checked. Then you have the multiple-choice items, in which the question is followed by a number of statements—three, four, five or six—usually arranged in a scale, either in ascending or descending order, so that the employee has a chance to choose one of a number of varying shades of opinion. One item might be "How fair are the people above you in their treatment of you?" followed by the answers, "Rarely fair; occasionally fair; about half the time fair; usually fair; practically always fair."

For those who would like more discussion of the various methods in use, may I suggest the "Manual of Employee Opinion Polling", issued by the Association of National Advertisers in conjunction with the American Association of Advertising Agencies. This manual is, I believe, one of the best discussions of the various methods of employee opinion polling. The writers of the manual called upon the practitioners in the field, quote a number of the different organizations and outline rather carefully some of the weaknesses and some of the strengths of the methods briefly mentioned here.

Perhaps we ought to mention just one other method, the use of the mail questionnaire. There are various methods of using the so-called "mail technique"—mailing the questionnaire directly to the home of the employee, passing the questionnaire out to the employees with the pay check, having the supervisor pass them out, and having them returned either by mail to the boss, or put in ballot boxes around the plant.

We have tried all of these various methods and have experimented rather fully with some of them. Based upon our experience and ex-

perimentation we have concluded that the self-administering questionnaire consisting largely of multiple-choice items, answered in group meetings, is the most satisfactory. Sometimes the set, printed questionnaire has to be supplemented with personal interviews.

I would ordinarily argue against the use of true-false statements or yes-no questions, but one firm has successfully used a questionnaire of such form for a quick check to find the sore spots and then have delved more deeply through the use of personal interviewing to define those sore spots.

### Form of Questionnaire

Our typical questionnaire usually takes the form of a printed 8½ x 11 inch booklet; number of questions may range all the way from 50 to 75 or 80, covering a large number of topics. We have some items that measure the general attitudes toward the company, its policies, and its treatment of employees. A number of items cover the quality of supervision, such as, the boss as a person to work with, reliance or dependence on promises or statements made by the boss, reprimands, helpful criticism, frankness with boss, boss's knowledge of the work done, praise, favoritism, and general fairness of the boss. Under the subject of instruction, there may be items about clarity of instructions, being given reasons why there are certain changes in method, access to the boss for help, definition of duties. Under the general topic of information, questions may be asked regarding information about personnel policies, changes in conditions that affect work, new developments in the company, and benefit plans. Questions on knowledge of standing, knowing if the boss is satisfied with the work done.

Under training—questions about initial training, about preparation for a better job, training meetings and courses. Other items may deal with the employee evaluation program, job rating and how fair it is (where the company has such a program), rating of the personnel office activities, questions about the cooperation of other departments, encouragement to offer suggestions, credit for suggestions, and if the company has a suggestion

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plan or system a series of questions about that in detail. Under promotion—only the best qualified people being selected for promotion, company's knowledge of which employees are best qualified, opportunities for advancement, the employee's own future prospects with the company, whether outsiders are being hired instead of promoting from within. Under pay, items dealing with internal comparison of pay, external comparison with other companies, pay increases, incentive or bonus plan when that is used. Other items may cover volume of work, hours, work handicaps, physical working conditions, safety, benefit plans (understanding of or rating of), lunch facilities, publications, company finances. The decision to include some of the above depends, of course, largely upon the problems discovered in the organization.

Our experience over a number of years has confirmed the usefulness of a series of broadly phrased items which ask in a variety of ways, "How do you like your company?", or "How do you like your job?". Responses to a series of ten such questions have been combined into a "battery" with score values assigned to the different answers so that we may add the scores for the various items and get a "morale score" for each individual. The simplest way of presenting this definition of employee morale is to list the attitudes and beliefs which characterize the employee who makes the highest possible score on the series of questions. Such an employee believes his company is one of the very best of all companies as one to work for; he thinks the management of his company cares more about the welfare of its employees than does the management of any other company; he knows of no other company where he would rather work if he could get an equally good job elsewhere; he blames himself and not the company for any dissatisfaction he may have experienced on the job; he thinks the company does a great deal more than one might expect to promote good working relationships between himself and the people with whom he works; he feels that he is really regarded as a part of the organization; he thinks the management of the company is always fair with people in

jobs such as his; he knows of no other company that treats its employees as well as his does; he feels that he can be sure of his job as long as he does good work. Another employee with very low morale would be the one who holds exactly the opposite attitudes.

The weights which we have assigned to these various items result in a score which ranges from zero to 100 with 50 at the theoretical neutral. Most employees do have some bias in favor of their company, so we do not find very many scores which are extremely low. For that matter, you'll find only a few that are down to zero, and you don't find too many that are 100. For a combined population of some 50,000 non-supervisory employees we found that only 19% had scores below 50, the neutral point. The average score of these 50,000 was 68 and the standard deviation of the distribution was 16.

We find this morale score a very useful device for making a quick comparison among companies, and among the various departments within a company. When we compare the average morale scores of companies and organizations in which we have made surveys, we find large differences. And these might be described as "better companies", because we have not had the opportunity of making any surveys in the less progressive companies. In other words, no company would have an employee attitude study made unless they had an enlightened personnel philosophy and were anxious to do something about improving personnel relations.

Taking only the companies with employee populations of 1,000 or more each, we have found the morale scores range from 57 to 77—20 points on a 100 point scale. As an indication of the very large difference this is, it happens to be 30 times the standard error of difference. We have found scores in some of the smaller organizations that ran well above 80. Among supervisors we found a range of 60 to 81 points. In smaller organizations, the highest we have found in any was 87.

**Results of Questioning**

To illustrate some of the differences between companies let us compare some of the findings

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in terms of the percentages of employees who have subscribed to certain statements abstracted from our questions and series of answers. One item might read as follows: "Generally speaking, how does this company compare as a place to work with other companies that you know about or have worked for?" The answers might be: "One of the very worst, worse than average, just average, better than average, one of the very best." The question arises, what answer should we be satisfied with? We have usually considered an answer satisfactory only if it rated the company at least above average. The employee should feel that their company is better than average. Then from that question and its answers we would abstract this statement, "As a company to work for, this company is better than average, or is one of the very best." Again comparing only employee populations of 1,000 or more, to emphasize the differences that exist, we find the proportion of employees rating their company as above average ranging from 39% to 87%. (In some of the smaller companies we have found 100 per cent favorable response.)

Among supervisors we found a range of 57 per cent to 98 per cent. And we find differences between supervisors and the rank and file in the same organization; sometimes very large differences. We often use at least two forms of the questionnaire, one for the rank-and-file employees and one for the supervisors; but many of the questions may be exactly the same in the two forms. For instance, in one organization it was found that 83 per cent of the supervisors believed their company was better than average and only 41% of the rank and file in that same organization believed their company was better than average, a difference of 42 percentage points. Or, let's take one having to do with one phase of supervision, "When I do some unusually good work I usually, or always, get recognition or praise for it." In one company only 22% of the employees subscribed to that. The highest observed percentage was 63. Among the larger companies the highest was 43%. Does not that indicate that one principle of personal administration—"recognize good work"—is not being practiced?

In one organization we found that 89% of the supervisors thought that they were getting recognition for good work, but only 28% of the people that worked under them said they got recognition for good work. In another organization, 40% of the rank and file stated they were given praise and recognition when they did good work, but only 12% of the supervisors. Now there's at least one case where the supervisors were giving their own people a little better treatment than top management was giving the supervisors.

I mentioned that we found a difference of 20 points in average morale score between two different companies. The morale scores vary within the organization often much more than 20 points. In general, I think we can say that we have found larger differences between the departments within any given company than we have between companies. As an illustration, take the general attitude statement, "As a place to work this company is better than average, or is one of the very best." In one organization, in one department, 100% of the employees so stated; in another department in that same company only 19% so stated. Another item, "There are very few other companies in which I would rather work at the same pay if I could get a job for which I felt equally qualified." 93% in one department, 37% in another. "I am made to feel that I'm really a part of the organization to a large extent, or in every way possible." In one department 88%, in another department 9%. "This company treats its employees better than most other companies do, or best of all." 100% in one department, 21% in another department. In another organization, for this same item, 64% of one department, 5% in another department.

These figures, differences between departments, are not necessarily the largest ranges we have found. The figures given are from surveys in companies where all of the employees are working under the same company policies and in all except one of the instances, in the very same building.

I would like to mention a rather interesting shift in responses to questions about manage-

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ment which has taken place since the war. Comparison of surveys we made just before the war, with surveys made during and just after the war, showed a very definite decrease in favorableness toward top management. During the last year or year and a half we have found that favorableness toward top management is increasing slightly.

We place a great deal of emphasis on items having to do with supervision in our questionnaires; we believe that a measure of the quality of supervision is of value not only to top management, but to the Personnel Department and the Training Department. It is useful also in stimulating supervisors to do a better job of personnel administration. In most organizations the supervisor gets definite measures in terms of production, cost ratios, spoilage, etc. and he knows that he is being judged on the basis of these reports. But he has had no measure of the quality of his supervision. With the use of the attitude survey, he now has a definite measure of his performance on another phase of his job, the personnel phase. I want to quote the figures from two surveys where we know that the results alone were the only stimulation which a particular department manager received. Between the initial survey and the re-survey this department increased about 50% in size. When the manager got the results of the initial survey he simply said that he was dumbfounded. But he admitted that he had paid very little attention to what might be called the personnel administrative side of his work. The average morale score of his group of people in the first survey was 37, and in the second, 72. In the first survey only 17% of his people said that "as a place to work this company is better than average"; in the second survey 58% so stated. In the first survey only 22% said that the people immediately above them were practically always fair in their treatment of them, and in the second survey 70%. "There is no favoritism shown in my department"—the initial survey 17%, the second survey 64%. "I feel completely free to ask questions about difficult problems which may come up in my work"—first survey 61%, second 97%. "If I had any cause for dis-

satisfaction I have a reasonably good or very good chance of getting a fair hearing and a square deal"—first survey 35%, second 88%. I've simply used these as illustrations of how some supervisors are stimulated by having a measure of their performance on this one phase of their work.

**Attitude Toward Surveys**

Earlier I named a good many of the topics that are often included in a survey. It is not always possible, however, to foresee all the subjects about which employees might wish to express an opinion. For that reason we usually include one extra blank page in the questionnaire with an invitation to "write any comments, complaints, questions or compliments which you may care to offer." We have found that from 30 to 80 per cent of the employees have availed themselves of the opportunity to add something more to the questionnaire. And we have found the employees expressing themselves very frankly. We've often used as an argument to show that the employees are taking this at its full face value, that the questionnaire is entirely anonymous, that they can express themselves as they wish about the company, the bosses, etc., without any kick-back, quotations from these volunteered comments. Here are a few; "My boss is a very hard man to work for, he cares nothing for the feelings of his employees." "I think the manager of our department is a SKUNK." "I think our department manager is very unfair, he's a slave driver and makes us do things when we should be doing something else. He is not fair to his employees. He also contradicts his employees, even if we are right. Maybe it's a change of department manager that we need. He thinks his employees are always laying down on the job. That's how lousy he is."

Then you have the opposite of that. "I've never had the privilege of working for as nice a man as my department manager. I think sometimes he may be too easy on us, but the fact is, he is sure pleasant. Being easy to work for makes me feel obligated to do the best I can. I have one of the finest men for

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a boss that ever lived. He never fails to praise or compliment you when you have done a good job. It is never *you* that has made a mistake, it's always *we*."

Now here's one that I thought was good as advice to management, "Get some better bosses." Another comment, "Good bosses seem to be few and very far between."

We have asked employees how they liked filling out these questionnaires and whenever we've asked the direct question the replies have been overwhelmingly favorable. Once in a while we do find some person who doesn't appreciate the opportunity, but we have had many "Thank you's", and statements like these: "Couldn't possibly be better;" "It's such a pleasant change to be considered as an individual, a human being, not just a machine"; "This is a grand idea; it happens so often that you don't dare express your feelings to any of the bosses for fear of losing your job." Or this one, "I've enjoyed this opportunity of expressing my opinion as regards the company I work for; I've most certain there isn't a better place to work." Another, "For the first time in nine years I've had a chance to express my thoughts." Or this somewhat belligerent comment, "It's about time the workers had a way of telling outright what they think of their jobs without fear of being fired."

But there is one factor which consistently stands out as one of the determinants in morale and that is the quality of immediate supervision. I would like to call your attention to one report comparing two units within the same organization where all of the factors except the quality of supervision might be said to be held constant. The company included a number of separate units which were almost identical in size, location, type of work, pay, hours, and working conditions. Methods and procedures were rigidly standardized. But each of these separate units had its own manager; each manager had his own methods of handling his people and his own ways of presenting and interpreting company policies and operating methods. In Unit A, 95% of the employees described the company as better

than average, but in Unit X only 65% called it better than average. And as far as we can tell, everything except supervision was exactly the same.

We do often encounter objections to the making of employee attitude surveys. A few of them: (1) "An alert management will keep close enough to its employees to know most of the answers without resorting to a survey." We have often asked members of management to estimate how they think the employees would answer certain questions. In one organization we divided the executives and management group into some eight separate groups and asked each of these groups to make an estimate as to how satisfied they felt their employees were. On one item, the matter of complete definition of duties, one group of assistant managers gave estimates that ranged from 50 to 70%. Taking all of them together we found that the estimates ranged from 5% to 100%, and in terms of the survey itself 59% of employees expressed satisfaction on that point. One department manager made a pretty good record, the coefficient of correlation between his estimates and the actual results was + .56. But the fact that most correlations were negative would substantiate the point that members of management do not always know how their employees feel. (2) Another objection oftentimes is that employees do not answer honestly. Either they will criticize everything, make many unreasonable demands, or they will be afraid to answer the way they feel. (3) Another objection is that we would have to do something about the results. It is of little value to make a survey unless the company is ready to do something about it. (4) Asking such questions may put dangerous ideas in employees' heads, suggest additional grievances and causes for complaints. We have a good deal of evidence that would show that that is not true.

Now, a few of the values of employee attitude surveys. The most obvious direct value is found in the evidence on specific questions depending, of course, upon the questions which are used, and they should be phrased and

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## Attitude Survey

selected with the problems of the particular organization in mind. Another value is that of detecting local sore spots in the organization, discovery of minor dissatisfactions, misinterpretations of company policies, misunderstandings. Third, an evaluation of general morale. Fourth, it gives management a better understanding of how employees react in matters important to morale. Fifth, stimulation of foremen and supervisors to do a better personnel job. Sixth, it paves the way for the introduction of a new program. Just as a school examination, audit of accounts, inventory of merchandise, have a two-fold purpose, it can be a measure of what has been accomplished and a definition of the present situation in order to proceed further with the program. Seventh, it serves as a check on the placement program, on the hiring procedure. Eighth, it assists in the public relations program. We know that good community relations have their foundations in favorable attitudes of employees.

Top management seldom knows how employees feel. Under stress of modern production it is often difficult for top executives to keep in close touch with the foremen or supervisors. Lines of communication from management down through the various levels of supervision to the rank and file may be well developed. But lines of communications in the opposite direction are usually subject to breaks, interruptions and poor connections. As a tool to aid management in securing a better understanding of how employees feel and think about their jobs, company policies and practices, quality of supervision, working conditions, and so on, the survey of attitudes and morale has been developed.

## Training of Apprentices

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Since we have a four year apprentice training period, the four per cent figure is multiplied by four to determine the number of apprentices we should always have in training. We determine the loss in apprenticeship per year. Let us assume that this loss is ten per cent; therefore, ten percent

## Training as a Factor

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favoritism, a failure to appreciate realistically the dignity and value of employees, time-worn and out-of-date notions of "giving jobs," bossism in industry—these management attitudes defeat the objectives of training programs.

If you accept these propositions, you must conclude that the training director has a responsibility much broader than is frequently recognized. You must agree, further, that top management has responsibilities in training that go beyond the mere provision of a training budget. You may conclude quite properly that no one knows how to meet these responsibilities; that we must all do a lot more thinking and experimenting and research on training. On that conclusion there can be little dispute. You may decide that the job is too big; that it can't be done. But it must be done if the system under which we operate is to continue. For the problem of securing ever more efficient cooperation of managements and manpower is a number one domestic problem of our time. The answer to that problem, its solution, must be found in training. There is no other way.

## Supervisory Training

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The tuition per class is \$2.00 for a ten-week term, or 40-hour session, or five cents per hour per student. The remaining costs are borne by the state department of vocational education, the state department of adult education, and the federal government.

of the number of apprentices in training must be added to the figure we just obtained, in order to have the original number complete their training at the end of four years. This final figure is the number of apprentices who must be constantly in training so that we may maintain the number of skilled workers in the company. We have found that this method works fairly well although we have not been able to live up to it 100%.