What Do You Know?

How do you get employees to tell you what you need to know? That's a tricky question, whether you need to know what trainees have learned in your three-day management-development seminar, or what employees think of their jobs and the organization.

First, we'll look at two novel ways to review a training program. Both methods use television, but neither will cut into your training-technology budget—even if you have no training-technology budget.

Then we'll look at employee-satisfaction surveys. Here's a step-by-step overview of how to prepare, conduct, and follow up on employee surveys.

Course Reviews in the TV Age

By Michael Berney, a principal with Berney Associates, a training and organization development firm, 4813 South 30th Street, Arlington, VA 22206-1536.

You have finished presenting several days of training. You need to review the course matter. In a few minutes, the course participants will be evaluating you—in part, on what they recall. How tedious will it be to review everything you've covered?

Here are two simple review activities guaranteed to take the pain out of reviewing course material. They use television programs as models, so the format will be familiar and engaging. What's more, participants themselves do the work, freeing you to observe and judge what they have learned.

Whichever model you choose, keep three goals in mind. You want to accomplish the following:

- create a high level of energy (to keep participants engaged);
- cover all the material (to provide a comprehensive review);
- let participants do the work (to integrate their learning).

Before you begin, investigate resources that might turn the room into a studio. Can you create a stage area? Can you flash an "applause" sign using an overhead projector or video screen? Can you set up the chairs so that the room looks like a studio auditorium with a center aisle? Can you print "tickets" for admission to the program and distribute them as participants enter the room? Can participants serve as host or panelists?

Course "Concentration"

The first review is set up as a television game show. One participant plays host and two teams compete to review the course. A third, smaller, set of participants serves as contest judges.

Set Up

The contest centers around a playing board on which columns represent course content and rows represent teaching methods used in the course.

The example shown in Figure 1 is for a workshop I conducted on management skills. The course covered such content areas as communication, delegation, motivation, and problem employees—they appear as column headings, across the top of the grid. I divided methods into exercises, readings, discussion, and applications—they appear on the left side of the grid.

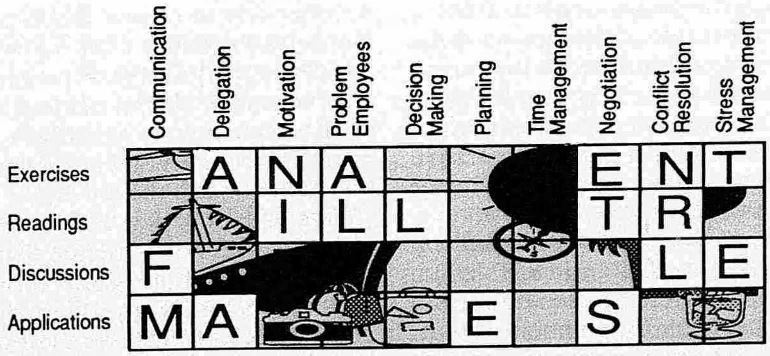
Once you have set up the matrix, see if you can fill in the squares with a title or message from your workshop, as in the figure. If that's not possible, number the squares.

Tape together two to four sheets of flipchart paper. Then transfer your matrix (just headings and the horizontal and vertical rules) to a flipchart. Cut out squares of cardboard to fill in the matrix, and lay

Figure 1—Game board at beginning of course review

	Communication	Delegation	Motivation	Problem Employees	Decision Making	Planning	Time Management	Negotiation	Conflict Resolution	Stress Management
Exercises	M	A	N	A	G	E	M	E	N	T
Readings	S	K	I	L	L	S		T	R	G
Discussions	F	O	R		M	I	D	D	L	E
Applications	M	A	N	A	G	E	R	S	!	

Figure 2—Game board after teams have turned over some squares



down the squares. On the front of the cardboard squares, write in the letters of the workshop title or message you have chosen, or number them.

Then turn the squares over. On the back of the cardboard "game board," draw a puzzle, picture, or pattern that teams will need to identify as they turn over one square at a time (see Figure 2). Now the game board is finished and ready to be mounted. You are now ready for the review session.

Warm Up

If you are familiar with live-audience TV shows, you'll recognize your role at the beginning of the session—you play Ed McMahon to Johnny Carson.

Warm up the audience: "This morning we'll have a little fun as we review everything we've covered in the course. How many of you watch TV game shows? Come on, confess. Okay, who would make a good Bob Barker or Monty Hall? Great! You can use my marker as a microphone. Now we need two teams of contestants and a panel of expert judges."

If you can hand the host a wireless mike instead of a magic marker, all the better. Anything you can do to embellish the activity will make the review more enjoyable.

It's How You Play the Game

The idea of the game is simple. Teams compete to turn over squares on the playing board. The first team to guess the puzzle or picture on the reverse side of the squares wins.

Keep your instructions brief. Give them to the host in front of the audience and permit him or her to explain them a second time as the show begins:

- In turn, each team selects a square on the board (for example, "We'll take the first 'L' in SKILLS").
- To occupy the square and turn over that letter (or number), the team must describe course content that falls under the proper column heading, covered by the method indicated by the row. In the example used in the figure, team members must describe a reading that discussed problem employees.
- The judges determine if the answer is correct.
- If the judges can't decide, the host throws it to the studio audience. The audience shows by applause whether a team answered correctly.

A Word From the Sponsor

Now, just stand on the sidelines, as participants try to remember everything you have covered. If you need to end the activity before one team wins, just pause for a commercial break.

One way to move the group out of the activity is to have participants help rearrange chairs and furniture as needed for the next activity, and then take their seats. Then go once around the room and ask each individual to share something he or she remembered about the course as the group was playing Course "Concentration."

Feel free to modify the game to suit your needs. Change the numbers and roles of participants. If your workshop has more than 30 trainees, add more teams. Create new roles for participants. Add a scorekeeper for each team. Change the room set-up.

Talk it over

Another way to review a multiple-day course is to use a talk-show format. Participants serve as panelists who comment on the training, and the host encourages a dialogue about the course content between the audience and the panelists.

This type of review provides participants with less structure than in the "Concentration" game. It permits discussion of any aspect of the course, not just those on the game-board matrix.

Before the Show Starts

The only preparation required is arranging the room and setting up supplementary equipment. If a video camera is available, you might put a tripod in the back of the room and plan to ask one participant to operate the camera.

Again, set the stage for the review activity by generating some excitement. Ask the group who would like to be Geraldo, Oprah, or Donahue. Tell participants that the subject for the show will be topics covered in the training course. Ask who would like to be panelists.

The Talk-Show Format

The key instructions involve staying on task. Give the following guidelines to the host:

- Keep everyone focused on reviewing the course.
- Get a dialogue going between panelists and the studio audience.
- Keep a high level of energy.

With this review method, you may want to take careful notes on points raised by participants. I sometimes find that this review technique surfaces issues and even frustration that may have been hidden as we worked through the daily agenda. For example, in one course covering problem solving and decision making, a participant commented on male/female dynamics within the training group.

Use this time to learn which issues trainees feel are important. Consider whether you want to explore them further before you move to the workshop evaluation.

Again, consider modifying the design. Perhaps you could allow the audience to "call-in" questions to the panel. You would distribute index cards to all participants and encourage them to write down questions, together with their names. A monitor could collect the cards and hand them over to a group of "receivers." The receivers would decide which callers get to ask their questions to the panel.

As the credits roll

Of course, game-show and talk-show format reviews will not work for every workshop. But when they are appropriate, they can generate a much higher level of collaboration and excitement than traditional, instructor-led reviews.

After finishing either the game-show or talk-show review, move participants out of the course review by taking a break. Then wait until the group reassembles to shift focus.

When everyone is seated, ask the group to consider how the review exercise differed from a more traditional review or summary of the training. Typical responses include, "We all got involved," "It kept our attention," and "I had to think." Then ask the group members for ways they can create innovative methods for reviewing topics in their work environments.

Employee Surveys, From Start to Finish

By Katherine E. Belmer, a principal partner of Excel Consulting Group, Box 5028, St. Charles, MO 63302, and Susan M. Johnson, program manager of management development for Hillsborough County, Florida, 625 Twiggs Street, Suite 203, Tampa, FL 33602.

Employee-attitude surveys are one of the most commonly used methods of assessing employee satisfaction. Many organizations pay outside firms huge amounts of money to develop, administer, and analyze surveys. All too often, the return on the investment is a document read only by upper-level executives.

Even industrious organizations that do all of the work in-house invest a great deal of time and money in survey design, preparation, administration, feedback, and action planning. Unfortunately, many companies do not get the full benefit of their employee-attitude surveys because of the steps they leave out of the process. Organizations can realize a great return on their investments by following some basic guidelines for success throughout the survey process, from concept and development to feedback and action planning.

Teaming up

The first step is to find a "champion" or sponsor for the survey. The typical champion is an upper-level, highly visible executive in the organization. The support and encouragement of such a person not only adds credibility to the project in the eyes of the organization, but can also be a strong motivator for all involved.

An executive steering team, led by the sponsor and made up of a representative from each major area of the organization, should be selected to oversee the survey process. The team's task is to define the objectives of the survey, to offer guidance and support to those implementing the survey, and to make major decisions regarding the process.

The executive team's job of defining survey objectives and outlining expectations is a key factor in the success of the survey. Throughout the process, the objectives will guide the decisions that need to be made. Success of the survey can be measured by how well the objectives are met.

Formation of a survey team is the next step. This team will probably consist of six to eight people who have experience with surveys or data analysis, and who understand the organizational structure. It helps if team members are also skilled in training design and delivery, presentation, facilitation, organization, and planning. The survey team is generally responsible for the legwork involved in the survey process.

Questions, questions

Once you have two teams and a list of survey objectives, your organization can consider the survey questionnaire itself. You have several options—designing your own questionnaire, purchasing a commercial one, or hiring a consulting firm to design one for your company's specific needs. Each option has advantages and disadvantages that should be carefully considered before you make a decision.

Whichever method you choose, you'll need to consider several factors. Questions should be tailored both to the unique environment and needs of your organization, and to the most common reading level of employees. If questions are too difficult to read or contain more than one thought or idea, respondents may become frustrated and give up without completing the questionnaire. Also consider the length. Respondents are more likely to complete a brief survey. Clear instructions, maybe with a generic sample item, are helpful.

You may want to add a few open-ended questions to the survey. One way of deciding which questions to include is to interview top executives from various divisions of the organization.

One of the more difficult tasks in developing the survey is to determine the population characteristics of the organization on which demographic questions will be based.

Demographic questions can serve several purposes. They allow you to determine if your survey respondents are representative of the organizational population. They make it possible to compare subpopulations with each other, and to determine the intervention needs of specific subpopulations.

Another type of demographic question can provide information to help managers in various parts of the company to analyze the data. How low in the organization to cut the data (for example, by division, department, or work group) can be determined by the specific objectives of the survey and by the organization charts of each division.

Demographic questions should be relevant to the comparisons you want to make, but not so detailed that respondents feel their anonymity is threatened. Provide thorough written and verbal explanations of how the demographic data will be used. The guarantee of confidentiality is crucial.

Spreading the word

An important element in survey administration is the question of how to administer the survey—on company time or through the mail to employees' homes. (See the box for a list of benefits and drawbacks for each method.) Your decision will be based on the organization's logistics and resources.

Regardless of which method you select, a publicity campaign can heighten employee curiosity and motivation to take part in the survey. Suggested publicity vehicles:

- large, colorful posters in strategic places that announce the date, time, and location of the survey;
- smaller signs in such places as conference rooms, break rooms, and cafeterias;
- an article on the survey—or, even better, an interview with the survey sponsor—in the company newsletter;
- memos written by department or division heads, encouraging employees to take advantage of the chance to express their opinions;
- announcements about the survey at staff meetings.

When planning ways to encourage employee involvement, remember several points:

- make the survey well-known;
- provide all employees with the opportunity to participate;
- make it convenient and even enjoyable for employees to participate.

Some large organizations have successfully used "survey hotlines" during the administration period. A hotline provides information on scheduling, administration, make-up opportunities, and general survey-related issues. Make the number available in the publicity media.

Preparing the survey packets is a crucial step in the survey process, but one that is often overlooked. Assemble and mail out the packets well in advance of the due date, or have them at the work sites for in-house administration. The following is a list of items that might be included in the survey packet:

- the questionnaire, including clear instructions;
- open-ended questions on a separate sheet with plenty of room for responses;
- computer-scannable answer sheets, if applicable;
- a number-two pencil (for use with scannable answer sheets);
- a cover letter from a top executive, thanking employees for participating, and stating the objectives and benefits of the survey, who is sponsoring it, how anonymity will be preserved, a return date (for mail-out surveys), and the availability of survey results;
- an envelope that can be sealed (pre-addressed and stamped, for a mail-out survey);
- an internal address or the location of a box in which to drop completed surveys (for a survey administered in-house).

If the questionnaires are mailed out, follow-up letters will probably increase the return rate. If surveys are administered on company time, give a brief introduction and a review of the instructions, emphasizing the confidentiality of responses.

In a large organization, the survey team may need to recruit a liaison from each division or department to aid in the administration of the survey and to help answer employees' questions.

Analysis and feedback

Many people involved in the survey will sit back and breathe a sigh of relief when the administration is over. For others, the real work is just beginning.

Data can be analyzed in several ways. The surveys can be sent outside the organization for tabulation and analysis. That is often the method used when a consulting firm is working with the company. Results can also be tabulated internally. With the availability of statistical packages for the PC, that is not as ominous a task as it once was. The level and type of analysis should be determined up-front during survey development.

Feedback reports from the data analysis should be generated at

several levels. An executive summary provides an overview of the results for the entire organization. It should include the following:
■ an introduction, with survey background and objectives;
■ demographic summaries, including the response rate and representativeness of the sample;
■ overall company results;
■ breakdowns of results by division or department;
■ recommendations describing possible areas of intervention for the whole organization.

In addition to the executive summary, reports should be generated for each of the organizational units that were identified in the survey-development stage.

Provide overall organization results to management before distributing survey results for organizational units. In addition, brief division and department directors on the results for their areas. In those feedback sessions, keep the focus on individual division or department results, rather than on a comparison of results with other organizational units.

Action planning

The true value of the survey process is in the widespread distribution of results and the use of those results by organizational units. You can ensure that survey results are widely and quickly disseminated by involving employees or teams of employees from each organizational unit. They will work with others from their areas to review their survey results and determine strengths, areas for improvement, and action plans.

Employees involved in that process should receive feedback training that covers the following topics:
■ background information and objectives of the survey;
■ a description of the survey questionnaire;
■ a summary of overall company results;
■ instructions on interpreting the results;
■ ideas on how to feed back the results;
■ details on how to develop action plans and follow-up steps.

After the training, team members will be able to confidently provide timely, meaningful feedback to other employees and to guide action planning with work groups in their areas. The teams should determine which areas for improvement can be dealt with at their levels and which should be passed up the chain of command for higher-level action.

All opportunities for improvement should be translated into action steps, with responsible parties assigned to each.

Finally, establish deadlines for completion of action items. Make sure upper management and all employees get regular progress reports on actions being taken and areas for improvement that are being resolved. In some organizations, action plans are incorporated into departmental or individual goals and objectives for the year.

While the rest of the organization is preparing action plans on the survey results, the survey team should be developing action plans for the next survey. Developing a comprehensive list of positive and negative lessons learned will enhance the next administration of the survey. Because surveys are an excellent way to measure employees' levels of job satisfaction, you can use each survey administration as a benchmark to measure progress from year to year.

Running an employee survey can be expensive and time consuming. But if you pay attention to the critical steps, from concept and development to feedback and action planning, a survey can enhance your organization's success in measuring employee attitudes and acting on the results.

Where To Administer Your Employee Survey

Should you send your company survey through the mail to be completed by employees at home, or should you administer it on company time? Each method has advantages and disadvantages.

Mail-out survey

The Pros
■ the method is simple (few personnel required);
■ respondents' anonymity is enhanced;
■ the survey does not disrupt work;
■ mailing surveys saves time and money;
■ if the population is geographically scattered, sending surveys by mail is more feasible than using company time.

The Cons
■ the method brings a lower response rate;
■ mailing slows response time.

Survey on company time

The Pros
■ the response rate is increased;
■ employees perceive the survey as important, because work time is provided;
■ employees feel their input is valued.

The Cons
■ the method requires a high level of planning and a high level of coordination;
■ multiple shifts may need to be accommodated;
■ special scheduling may be required to avoid work stoppages.

"Training 101" is edited by Catherine M. Petrini. Send your short articles for consideration to Training 101, Training & Development Journal, *1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.*