Chapter 11
Exploring Organizational Cultures through Virtual Survey Research

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ABSTRACT

The survey is regarded as the most commonly used methodological tool in gathering information. There are many types of surveys, but this chapter discusses how to conduct and analyze quantitative and qualitative survey research in virtual environments via online or computer-administered surveys. Corporations are increasingly relying on virtual surveys to acquire knowledge about their employees' morale, satisfaction, and productivity. Hence, this chapter is intended as a tutorial guide for exploring organizational cultures through virtual survey research. This chapter explains in detail how to design survey questionnaires, sample subjects, analyze data both quantitatively and qualitatively, and finally how to interpret survey results. Strengths and limitations associated with using virtual surveys are highlighted. The chapter also considers future directions for understanding employees' needs through virtual survey research.

INTRODUCTION

Picture these scenarios: The chief executive officer of a Fortune 500 company wants to know how to motivate his or her employees to double company profits within the next five years. A manager of a

small, yet profitable company has recently noticed that the employees seem uninspired and apathetic; hence, the manager desires to understand what is impacting worker morale. A boss at a newly established corporation seeks to unearth employees' perceptions of the strengths and limitations of communicating virtually. These are just some of the many questions that confront upper manage-

ment on a regular basis. With these questions in mind, corporations must explore possible avenues for answering these important questions.

At its most fundamental level, research is defined as the process of asking questions and finding answers to those questions (Keyton, 2011). When questions are answered, investigators can use the answers to make necessary decisions. In the first scenario, for example, if research revealed that employees would be motivated to increase their level of productivity if the company offered more flexible working hours, then the CEO might be motivated to implement some flexibility in the work schedule. Likewise, as stated in the second scenario, if research suggested that the manager could improve worker morale and satisfaction by personally visiting with the employees more often, then the manager might be willing to schedule monthly or at least quarterly face-to-face meetings. In reference to the third scenario, if research indicated employees perceive that the strengths of communicating virtually far outweigh the limitations, then the boss might become a strong advocate for virtual work. In other words, when company leaders take on the role of detective by asking questions and seeking answers to those questions, they allow themselves to track down the information needed to make decisions (Keyton, 2011).

Researchers have explored a plethora of important topics related to employees, including organizational climate and employee engagement (Langford, 2009), relational limitations intrinsic to virtual work (Gilchrist, 2010), job satisfaction (Tsair-Wei, Wen-Pin, Chih-Wei, Weng-Chung, Shih-Chung, Hsien-Yi, & Shih-Bin, 2011) and perceptions of safety (Carder, 2003; O'Toole & Nalbone, 2011). These topics have been instrumental in enhancing our understanding of employees' needs and facilitating a more productive work environment. Though these topics have varied in their overall methodology, each of them has used surveys as the prime methods for data collection. Because surveys, in particular those administered

virtually, are readily used to acquire data about employees in the field of organizational communication, this chapter explores survey research and virtual work. Specifically, the chapter addresses conducting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative survey research in a virtual environment, while exploring the strengths and limitations associated with both approaches.

BACKGROUND

Psychologist James Cattell (1860-1944) is one of the pioneers of survey research. Cattell started using mental measures to examine college students and, thus, established psychology as a legitimate science. According to Reinard (2008), the term *survey* involves "the process of looking at something in its entirety" in order to scrutinize "the complete scope of something" (p. 346). Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, and McCroskey (2008) add that a survey is "a social scientific method for gathering quantifiable information about a specific group of people…" (p. 214). However, in social scientific research, the terms *survey* and *questionnaire* are often used interchangeable and refer to the use of questions for the purpose of discovering descriptive characteristics about phenomena (Reinard, 2008). More specifically, a questionnaire is "a form containing a series of questions and mental measures that is given to a group of people in an attempt to gain statistical information about the group as part of a survey" (Wrench, et al., 2008, p. 215). This chapter uses the terms *survey* and *questionnaire* to refer to the tools used in survey research.

The survey is regarded as the most commonly used methodological tool in gathering information (Keyton, 2011), and it is frequently done at a single point in time, though multi-time research is also available via the survey (Watt & van den Berg, 1995). Surveys are especially useful when gathering information about populations that are too large for everyone in the population to be

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