

This article appeared in Quality Progress Magazine, December 1998

Are Your Surveys Generally Suitable for Wrapping Fish?

by Ken Miller

There's no question that the popularity of surveys is on the rise. You can't go anywhere without being asked to complete one. They are in every hotel room and restaurant, and on every airplane. I fully expect to come home from work one day and find a survey from my wife on the kitchen counter.

If paper and pencil surveys are the panacea for building long-term relationships as some suggest, then why don't people survey their spouses? After all, wouldn't it be valuable to know that this year my wife rated me a 9 out of 10, which is 10% higher than last year? Surely I could do some kind of regression analysis to figure out what I'm doing right.

The fact is, people don't survey their spouses. Why? Because they intuitively know surveys are not very effective and there is a better, simpler way to learn how to satisfy one's spouse.

Why Use Surveys?

So if people don't survey their spouses, why do organizations survey their customers? Consider a typical survey and some of the assumptions people make when they create or use them.

Assumption No. 1: Surveys tell companies that their customers are satisfied. This would be true if the organization knew that the questions on the survey were truly related to what customers want. Are they? Where do survey questions come from? If your surveys are like the ones I've seen, they are developed by a committee of people in a series of meetings without a customer in sight. The end result is a survey to determine how satisfied customers are with a number of factors that the organization believes customers think are important.

One improvement to surveys over the years has been the inclusion of questions such as: "Overall, how satisfied are you with..." Even if the questions being asked are poor, organizations will at least have some indication of a customer's general satisfaction level.

I recently worked with an organization that had just finished surveying its customers. Members of the organization developed the questions without really knowing what customers wanted and needed my help interpreting the results. When I asked why they needed my help they said, "We don't think the customers understood the questions." It turns out that the organization's customers said they were satisfied with the organization overall, but were not satisfied with the

specifics asked about on the survey. The customers were satisfied but the organization had no idea why. It could have been worse; the customers could have been satisfied with all the factors listed but unsatisfied overall.

Please read the remainder of this article at this website.

<http://www.imtc3.com/files/article/AT02%20Are%20Your%20Surveys%20Only%20Suitable%20for%20Wrapping%20Fish1890179.pdf>