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## Personnel survey

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The development and stabilisation of an enterprise is dependent on product and process innovations and the vocational competences of its employees are a further essential competitive factor. Continuously compiled and readily available information on the state of personnel development is therefore a necessary element of success-oriented management.

An efficient method to this end is the **personnel survey**.

The following article should serve as a useful information to enable general managers, directors and employees responsible for operative initial and further vocational training in enterprises to obtain necessary details as efficiently and accurately as possible.

The personnel survey is a method of recording and assessing objective criteria in the enterprise on the state of personnel development by means of a personal survey by the managing director or persons responsible for vocational initial and further training.

The personnel survey

- + serves for the efficient acquisition of information on the state of development of vocational competence among the employees of the enterprise,
- + supports dialogue with the employees and promotes the development of a confident working environment,
- + allows employees to better recognise their own strengths and weaknesses relevant to the development of the enterprise and to introduce their own suggestions by way of personal dialogue with the managing director.

The implementation of the personnel survey in the recommended form is only effective in conjunction with other methods of information acquisition and processing conducted throughout the entire organisation.

The personnel survey has therefore

1. on the one hand a change function through the recognition of the professional strengths (potentials), weaknesses (deficits) and the attitude of the employees to lifelong learning and of the enterprise itself towards becoming a learning location,
2. on the other hand the feedback function on the effectiveness of the initial and further training measures within the enterprise.

## Three phases are recommended for the personnel survey

1. Prior considerations regarding the aims of the survey and preparation of suitable materials and methods for compiling the requisite information. The developed checklists are an effective medium.
2. Recording of the most important information from personal impressions and dialogues with the employees about the checklists and the first situation-dependent influence on the persons concerned or the organisation of the enterprise.
3. Evaluation of the personnel survey and first conclusions for the operational staff, organisational development and further training requirements.

### 1<sup>st</sup> phase – Initial considerations and preparation

As with other management tasks, the personnel survey calls for an exact prior identification of aims, as a starting point for all further considerations and measures. A personnel survey without targets is generally useless to both sides and a hindrance to making a sound evaluation later. The everyday experience is interesting, that the first impression often conceals both the concrete deficits and particular strengths of employees and the picture can quickly change, if certain previously recognised criteria are consulted. The relationship of trust is positively consolidated, if the manager or the person responsible for the vocational training can back up his later statements with facts and criteria.

The main emphasis of the personnel survey must be effective, comprehensive and assessable. Simple checklists with just a few criteria and indicators, which can be replaced or reintroduced without any great difficulty, have been tried and proved. In this way, changes and developments in particular can be identified.

Based on modern trials, the following subdivision of aims for the personnel survey of staff and organisational development is suggested:

- + Determination and assessment of the technical and methodical competences/skills of employees.
  - + Determination and assessment of social and communicative skills.
- (= see also section on individual competence profiling)

### 2<sup>nd</sup> phase – Recording and exertion of influence

For the relationship of trust between the managing director, staff and employees it is advantageous, if the employees interviewed at the workplace are informed about the concern of the survey. Transparency is always a sign of respect and goodwill to others. Barriers and reservations can be removed in this way, because the survey is also in the interest of the employee. It concerns ultimately the safeguarding of his workplace and the further development of the enterprise.

If this method of assessing competences is regularly used, then the employees will adapt to it and offer suitable considerations and suggestions for improvements in vocational skills.

The recording of criteria should not place any perceptible pressure or time limits on the employee and should, where possible, be linked to personal dialogue. A personnel survey should not be conducted at the beginning or end of a working week.

Of course, in the direct recording of criteria some things have to be assessed, which, as experience shows, does not heavily harm the overall results. Care should be taken to ensure that average values included in the later evaluation based on estimated values are not over-estimated. Important are trends and the overall picture.

The managing director or other users of the method should also make personal notes when filling out the checklists.

#### Additional notes

- + serve to record additional previously selected or unplanned sequences and events in an individual form and
- + offer a more differentiated recording of observed events in the enterprise or at the workplace of the employee.

In addition, they contribute to the trial combination of certain checklists and to further improve them. The additional notes should only relate to what has been clearly observed. A first snap assessment should be avoided, unless it concerns questions of industrial health and safety standards, fire precautions, quality control etc.

In principle, the personnel survey should be implemented in this suggested form dealing with the employees casually and stress-free. The personnel survey should not be mistaken for appraisal interview and should not replace them.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> phase – Evaluation and conclusions**

So far there are no direct precedents for the evaluation of personnel surveys in this suggested form. However, comparable experience with similar methods can be referred to.

The most essential principle is the same for all assessment situations:

→ *Research first - then judge!*

This means, first fill out the checklists and carry out the evaluation at a later point in time. The time lapse between recording and evaluation should nevertheless be kept as short as possible. If an appraisal interview immediately follows the personnel survey, then the impressions are still fresh in memory. The personal notes are indispensable in this case, because they contain more information than documented on the checklist.

The evaluation of the recorded criteria should be carried out under as little effort as possible. The familiar principle of quality assurance applies here:

→ *Not as correct as possible – but as correct as necessary!*



A comparison between the estimated and the desired specifications of the criteria has to be made in any case. This can be done by visual comparison without the use of any complicated mathematical instruments. Essential deviations should be marked on the checklist. It should also be taken into account that not all criteria can have – and must necessarily have – the highest specifications. Care should therefore be taken that the essential criteria for the enterprise philosophy are available in the desired quality. In addition, these can also change in the course of the development of the enterprise. If, for example, an enterprise wants to turn to teamwork, the social and communicative skills of the employees in particular should be analysed. If the enterprise wants to improve the quality of work, then the technical and methodical competences of the employees should be examined.

Another principle should be taken into account in the context of the evaluation:

→ *A definition of criteria without conclusions is of no value.*

The experienced and successful managing director will draw his conclusions and establish suitable measures from every personnel survey. For this the following aid (= see also section on individual competence profiling) is recommended.

The training can encompass:

- + initial occupational training
- + further training in the process of working
- + acquisition of additional qualifications
- + quality management etc.

## **Summary**

The staff and organisational development viewed, from the aspect of stabilisation and further development of the enterprise, is a permanent process that can be supported by the suggested personnel survey of concrete and objective statements concerning the existing vocational competence of the employees.