

# White Paper

# Organizational Surveys

## How to Create a Process Maturity Benchmark

WP0124 | January 2014



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Craig is known throughout the business world as “The Process Ninja” – he is a passionate advocate of business process management.

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Contact Craig to discuss how he can improve your organization.

**As analysts we often approach assessing organizational process maturity by running workshops or “walking” processes. These approaches can be time consuming and it’s often difficult to consistently measure the maturity of the processes.**

This white paper looks at a way to measure organizational process maturity using simple, web-based survey tools.

In summary, this white paper explains:

- Why a process maturity benchmark is of value
- What web-based survey tools can be used and their key features
- What questions to ask to get meaningful results
- How to use the survey on an ongoing basis to quantify improvements

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# Why a process maturity benchmark is of value

Measuring current process maturity levels using surveys gives us a great way to kick-start a process improvement initiative or transformation program without spending precious resource time doing it. With just a few hours of work we can create a reusable survey that will provide valuable information about the organization's processes.

A survey can add great value for the following reasons:

1. It's extremely simple to get the opinions of all of the employees within an organization which enables a "global" view of the process
2. It establishes a starting point from which we can measure changes in the process landscape by re-running the survey each year
3. It pinpoints areas of "process pain" that can be targeted to quickly gain results
4. It helps display to the staff that their opinions are heard and encouraged

## Web-based survey tools explained

Web-based survey tools such as SurveyMonkey or Zoomerang provide low-cost, easy-to-use survey tools that you can use to build your questionnaire. With only minutes of training using their self-help tutorials, you can be up and running designing surveys. Furthermore once you have purchased a corporate license your entire organization can use the survey tool to design surveys for a variety of uses such as customer surveys or project surveys. You may find that your organization may already be using one of these tools – the Marketing department is a good place to check first!

Some of the key features of these tools include the ability to:

- Design and save surveys for re-use
- Send surveys by email using a link
- Have anonymous surveys
- Download results to a number of formats (e.g. Excel) for analysis purposes
- Automatically create charts for presentation purposes

## Getting the Survey Right

Whilst surveys are easy to create in web-based survey tools there are a few things you should consider carefully before designing the survey:

1. **Length.** The survey needs to be as short as possible but as long as necessary! Any more than 5 minutes to complete the survey and you risk people dropping off halfway through.
2. **Language.** Keep the question language very specific. Ambiguity will lead to meaningless results. Have a colleague with good written English skills review it for you.
3. **Make it easy.** The survey should not be mentally taxing or overtly elaborate. If in doubt make it simple for the person completing the survey. Whilst survey tools have a wide variety of question formats, try to stick to ones that staff will be familiar with.
4. **Brand.** Do brand your survey with your corporate logo and colors. It will make the survey look professional.
5. **Anonymity.** If you want candid results (and why wouldn't you) – ensure that your survey is 100% anonymous.
6. **Time.** Give staff adequate time (but not too much time) to complete the survey – a week is a good timescale. Follow up with reminders and use multiple communication methods to boost response rates!

## Designing the Survey

The following section details an example of a process improvement survey that you can use as a template to kick-start your survey. For each question I detail the relevance of the question and how it can aid your organization's process improvement efforts.

### The Title

Keep the title simple and in terms that anyone in the organization can understand. e.g. "Business Process & Procedure Survey".

### 1. What is your role at <company name>?

Ensure that you check with your Human Resources Department to correctly identify the different levels of roles within the organization. You are not looking to include all of the roles in the organization, but bands of roles that can provide meaningful data when cross-referenced with results. For example identifying whether a staff member is one of the C-suite.

## **2. What is your Location?**

This is a very important question as it can help to identify process inconsistencies by geographic location. Maybe one office is doing a process in a totally different way? Maybe some locations do not feel they are being adequately supported? Again this question provides a great opportunity to slice and dice the data to identify opportunities for improvement.

## **3. What is your Department?**

This question can help to pinpoint specific departments that are in need of improvement and these departments can be targeted for assistance. Again, be as specific as you can be without necessarily listing every microcosm of your business. Any more than about 20 departments in your question list then it gets too hard for staff to complete.

## **4. How Complete is the Process and Procedural Documentation in Your Department?**

Most staff use process or procedural documentation at some point in their day-to-day jobs and this question helps to highlight which locations or departments are documenting their processes. A lack of process documentation can point to a department being overworked or even poorly run, and a lack of process documentation can lead to increased risk for firms that are highly regulated. In short we can identify which areas to investigate further.

Example responses could include:

- Fully Complete
- Somewhat Complete
- No Documentation
- Don't Know

## **5. Why do you think the documentation is incomplete? (Select as many as appropriate)**

Staff will often be surprisingly candid with their responses so don't be afraid to ask questions that may seem confronting at first glance. The benefit of an anonymous survey is that you will get honest results. This question will help pinpoint the reasons behind the lack of documentation so you can plan to tackle the issues.

Example responses could include:

- Not a work priority
- Staff dislike writing documents
- Too hard to complete templates
- Staff do not have the skills
- Other (please specify)

## **6. How often do you use process or procedural documentation?**

By this question we mean process and procedural documentation not just in softcopy but also hardcopy. It's an interesting question to ask as it helps to identify how much employees rely on information in their heads or whether they access documents. This can be a particularly interesting question if the responses show that you are spending large amounts of time creating or updating documentation and your employees aren't using it!

Example responses could include:

- Daily
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Never
- Other (please specify)

## **7. How important do you think Processes and Procedures are to the operation of <company name>?**

This may at first glance seem like a redundant question; after all, aren't all processes and procedures important? However the question can help to identify pockets of resistance to documentation that can be targeted for improvement.

Example responses could include:

- Very Important
- Important
- Not Important
- Unimportant

## **8. Which area of <company name> do you think would benefit most from improved Processes & Procedures?**

Whilst this question may seem to encourage finger pointing there is sometimes no shying away from obvious problems and employees will always be keen to tell you exactly where things can be improved –

particularly when it's not within their own department. However, take responses with a pinch of salt as internal politics can often rear its ugly head!

### **9. How much could your own business unit benefit from process or procedural improvement?**

It's a myth that employees will always rate their departments highly – often it's the opposite. This is a good question to tap into what employees are thinking about their own department's process maturity. Comparing what employees within departments think of their processes versus what other departments think of them can be very interesting.

Example responses could include:

- Greatly
- A Little
- None

### **10. How do you usually access process and procedural documentation? (Tick all that apply)**

One of the greatest challenges in business today is not that the information exists, but that it's difficult to get access to quickly. This question identifies what methods people typically use to access documentation. This information can then be used to target different ways of providing access to the information.

Example responses could include:

- Intranet
- Network Drive
- Printed Document
- Document Management System
- Company Website (Internet)
- Other (please specify)

### **11. How useful do you find the process and procedural documentation?**

Just because documentation exists, doesn't mean that it is necessarily good documentation. Assessing the usefulness of documentation is key. If there are negative responses it's time to look at the way that documentation is completed.

Example responses could include:

- Very Useful
- Useful
- Not Useful
- Useless

## **12. On average would you say that the process and procedural documentation is accurate?**

Accuracy of documentation is very important to highly regulated industries. A lack of accuracy points to process and procedural documentation not being prioritized and can also be indicative of communication channels not working effectively to update staff on changes to process, procedures and policies.

Example responses could include:

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

## **13. Are you involved with updating the process and procedural documentation?**

Are staff spending too much time documenting processes? Are there too many staff from each department documenting them? Maybe there aren't enough? Maybe the wrong staff are updating documents. This question will help fill in those blanks.

Example responses could include:

- Yes
- No

## **14. How easy would you say the procedural templates are to use?**

Staff will typically use standard templates to complete documentation, but if those templates are not easy to use staff won't use them.

Example responses could include:

- Very Easy
- Easy
- Neither Easy or Hard
- Hard
- Very Hard

### **15. How often is process and procedural documentation updated in your business area?**

Identifying how often documents are updated is valuable in order to measure different department's commitment to keeping information accurate. It also helps to identify any regulatory breaches where documentation must be kept up-to-date on a specified basis.

Example responses could include:

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Annually
- Greater Than Annually
- Never
- Don't Know
- Other (please specify)

### **16. How easy is it to get the information you need from the process and procedural documentation?**

Ultimately when staff access documentation they want to get the information as quickly as possible. If that information is buried under layers of irrelevant information staff will simply turn to other ways of finding the information, such as asking colleagues. This in turn can lead to erroneous information and increased cost. So measuring ease of access to information is critical.

Example responses could include:

- Very Easy
- Easy
- Difficult
- Very Difficult

### **17. How do you think the usefulness of process and procedural documentation could be improved? (Tick all that apply)**

For this question, come up with a range of choices that suit your organization's maturity. An electronic content management system might be a great idea, but if it doesn't fit within your organization's budgetary restraints you'll be creating false hope in employees' minds.

Example responses could include:

- Simplify Documentation
- Create Quick Reference Guides for Staff
- Build Procedures into Software Systems
- Consolidate documents
- Make finding documents easier
- Use other forms of media (video / audio, etc)
- Other (please specify)

**18. When do you use process and procedural documentation?  
(Tick all that apply)**

Identifying how your staff uses the process and procedural information can help with tailoring the documentation to suit the purpose. For example, if staff use the documents mostly when assisting customers, it is worth putting extra effort into creating quick reference guides or on screen help documentation.

Example responses could include:

- When assisting a customer
- When doing an admin task
- When I don't know something
- When I need to learn something new
- When I am training a staff member
- I never use it
- Other (please specify)

**19. Please add any other suggestions regarding Processes and Procedures that may help us to improve the way that we currently use the documentation.**

Always have an open-ended question to allow staff to communicate any other suggestions that may not have been covered by the questionnaire.

## Ongoing Surveys

One of the most powerful aspects of creating a process and procedural survey is that it creates a benchmark. By repeating the survey on an annual basis it is possible to measure changes in results. These variations can help to identify where your process improvement efforts are succeeding or failing, so that action can be taken.

## Conclusion

Process surveys are an easy to use, fast and effective way to establish a process maturity benchmark. This white paper has detailed:

- Why a process benchmark is important
- Recommended online survey tools to use
- How to design the survey
- Example questions and responses
- The importance of ongoing surveys

Following these simple tips will help produce a survey that will make staff feel part of the change initiative and provide a useful process benchmark that can be used to measure the success of process improvement initiatives.

If you'd like to read more about business process improvement, please visit Craig's blog, The Process Ninja at [www.theprocessninja.com](http://www.theprocessninja.com)

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