Designing, Administering, and Utilizing an Employee Attitude Survey

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Abstract

Employee attitudes and the inclusion of their opinions and suggestions are most important in today's global and competitive work environment. In the American business environment, we are dealing with many different generations, each having diverse wants, needs, goals, and aspirations. The more that management knows about their employee's feelings, the easier it is to manage their behavior to help them grow and the economy will prosper. Logic and research seems to agree that front- line employees are in the best position to assess the organization's actions, problems, and proposed solutions.

This paper presents a very practical approach to design, administer, conduct respondent feedback of results, and assist local management in helping to resolve issues and problems identified within a department or unit in most organizations based on a real world example.

Keywords: Organizational climate survey, employee attitude survey, designing a survey, administering a survey.

Introduction to Organizational Climate Surveys

Managers and leaders are usually concerned about the overall attitudes and opinions of their employees and often make ongoing assessments to measure it. Consequently, they usually resort to Organizational Climate Surveys (also known as Employee Attitude Survey) to measure the opinion and views of employees in the organization and its various units. Most researchers agree that organizational surveys provide a more direct and comfortable tool for communicating with department or unit management. Research also indicates that employee attitude surveys can be a powerful tool to demonstrate to employees that management desires their input for integration into the decision-making process. Such beliefs can be associated with increased morale, motivation, and productivity. Organizational surveys began as a means of measuring employee morale in the year after World War II; subsequently, most organizations have conducted a company survey at least once (Hinrichs, 1991) between different parts of an organization. Surveys are especially useful for establishing upward communication from lowerlevel employees to management (Edwards, Rosenfeld, Thomas, and Booth-Kewley, 1997). Although voting preference polls and surveys of general social attitudes receive most of the media's attention, surveys have long been used in business, government agencies, universities, and other organizations (Rosenfeld, Edwards, and Thomas, 1995).

Once it has been decided that a survey is the method one wants to use for gathering data, then he or she must consider the content or topics it will include. This is a difficult task because any single survey can encompass hundreds of ideas. Managers and survey designers need to decide a survey's content and this means setting up the boundaries so that one can select and write the right questions for finalizing the instrument (Fink and Kosecoff, 1998). Fink and Kosecoff (1998) noted that multiple-choice, closed-ended survey questions consist of a stem, which typically present a statement, question, brief case history, or the situation, and are followed by several alternative choices or solutions. The following are suggested rules for their construction.

- 1. Each question should be meaningful to respondents.
- 2. Use regular English without any technical jargons.
- 3. Make questions concrete.
- 4. Avoid biased words and phrases.
- 5. Check your own biases.
- 6. Use caution when asking about personal information.
- 7. Each question should have just one thought.

According to Babbie (1998), today, survey research is the most frequently used mode of observation in the social sciences. The survey research is probably the best method available to the social scientist interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly. Additionally, the self-administered questionnaires are generally cheaper and quicker than face-to-face interview surveys. According to Edward et al. (1995), organizational surveys appear to be increasing in popularity due to current management emphasis on employee involvement, customer satisfaction, total quality, and excellence in business practices.

Other ways of helping what survey design and questions might be is to network with other similar organizations. Verheyen (1988) correctly notes that concerns addressed in other organizational surveys are frequently the same as those found in survey teams. Most researchers

note that the quality of questionnaire design is generally recognized as an important factor for self-administered instruments (Dillman, 1978, 1983); however, the importance and special problems of design for questionnaires to be administered by interviewers have not been acknowledged equally.

The KISS strategy (Keep it simple, stupid) is good advice for survey item writers. If your organization chooses to use a team approach, the team should strive to write simple, clear items and keep the items as short as possible (Converse & Presser, 1986; DeVellis, 1991; Spector, 1992). At this point, it is sufficient to say that the validity of attitude surveys to assess employee attitudes and concerns has been well researched and substantiated. Historically speaking, the use of surveys actually can be traced back to the Romans who used them to assess the population by geographical area. However, the authors believe that the pot of gold does not always lie in following all the scientific theories and formulas. This paper presents an actual event based on practical experience for in-house human resource professionals that proved very successful and was administered throughout a large organization in the Midwest by Senior Management.

Purpose of an Employee Attitude Survey

A survey is a method of collecting information directly from people about their ideas, feelings, health, plans, beliefs, social education, and financial background (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998). Although the focus here is on using surveys in an organization, this method of measurement and assessment is very popular in society at large (Edward et al., 1997). More than 70% of organizations survey their employees either annually or biannually. Yet there is not much specific, practical, and documented information about creating employee surveys (Braken-Paul, & Bracken 1995). It is hoped that this paper will be of use by filling the gap.

Seeking employee opinions is not a new concept some employees are comfortable discussing their opinions, others are not. Lack of trust and respect, on either or both parties' parts, can lead to biased results. Open door policies seem to be a business buzz word and in some cases work for communication. But open door policies are not often perceived as genuine by the employees. Focus Groups are another popular communication technique to seek employee opinions but can be highly influenced by a dominant personality since some employees would be uncomfortable speaking in front of groups, especially if their opinions involve a member of the group. Employee opinions can be solicited by Employee Suggestion Boxes, but are not always seen as beneficial especially if employees do not see any tangible results. Employee evaluation sessions are an opportunity to seek employee feedback, but may be viewed as being used against their appraisal if negative.

A technique that has been effective, if designed, administered properly, validated, and used as a basis to make some suggested changes and improvements, is an Employee Attitude Survey which is a tool to solicit anonymous employee opinions and suggestions. The construction of a questionnaire should begin with a clear statement of its purpose or objectives. Focus groups of interested informed people can help generate ideas for a survey (Aiken, 1997). Before launching a project of this nature, careful planning must be contemplated, completed, and put in place. It is suggested that a department or unit be chosen to serve as a pilot. Probably, the smaller unit is the better it is for the pilot study. The manager of that department and his/her employees should be well informed of the nature of the project. The Human Resource Manager and the Department Manager should agree on a trusted, respected Project Leader if the Human Resources Department is not going to administer the program. There must be a detailed project

plan that is approved by the HR Manager, the department, and unit manager. The results of the survey should be confidential. Moreover, it is suggested that the Project Leader not come from within the department or work unit under study. If the department consists of more than one work group, each work group should be identified and the surveys coded in such a manner that individual groups can be identified for initial and later feedback and analysis purposes such as A, B, C, etc. It is important to leave ample time for employee feedback and the survey participants should be the first to view the data. This will assist in validating the data since the same question can mean different things to different people. Methodology and length of feedback time must be determined so proper scheduling can take place. Employee feedback or the survey results should occur as soon as possible after its administration and led by the Project Manager. Only the employees and the Project Manager should attend the feedback session(s). Overall, the Survey instrument should be short in nature, to the point and the questions designed to ascertain the employee opinions in the areas that the Department Manager and HR Manager may be concerned with or interested in obtaining employee opinions.

Survey Sample and Design

Now that the essential information is available, it is time for the actual design of the Survey. Fink and Kosecoff (1998) noted that surveys are data collection techniques used to obtain information from people. Human resource professionals or the designers must ask from which people, how often and when should the survey be administered? As soon as you raise such questions, you must become concerned with the sample and design of the survey. The sample is the number of people in the survey. The designers need to consider when and how often the survey should take place (just once, cross-sectional over time, or should it be longitudinal?).

Brickman and Rog (2009) suggest that a good question is one that produces answers that are reliable and valid measures of something we want to describe. Reliability is used here in the classic psychometric sense of the extent to which answers are consistent: Care and special attention should be given to assure that the questions are clear.

At the beginning, have a general information section covering the survey's purpose. Define any terms/definitions that the employees need to know, how to respond, anonymity, etc. Fear of reprisal is an issue that highlights an important distinction between organizational surveys versus those used for social, political polling, or marketing purposes (Edwards, et al., 1997). The department/unit manager and the Survey Administrator need to spend extra time to assure anonymity and if fear still exists, the option of not taking the survey should be available.

The designers should list any specific or special meanings of terms that the employees need to know to better answer the questions. Terms such as "Boss" or "Supervisor," "Work Group," "Here" "Around here," and so on should be clearly defined. The employees should not have to guess what the words mean. It would be helpful to walk through the definitions so that each employee clearly understands and this will ensure they all are aware of what the questions are asking and how to respond. Bickman and Rog (2009) cite four basic characteristics of questions and answers that are fundamental to a good measurement process:

- 1. Questions need to be consistently understood.
- 2. Respondents need to have access to the information required to answer each question.
- 3. The way in which respondents are asked to answer the questions must provide an appropriate way to report what they have to say.

4. Respondents must be willing to provide the answers called for in the question.

As part of the questions, list several steps to follow in expressing feelings about each question. A sample of directions for these steps could be as follows: Read each item before starting to mark you answer, pick the one answer which most nearly says what you or how you feel, and feel free to change your answer(s). Provide directions that you believe will be of importance to assure the accuracy of the data provided. For example: "I enjoy the weather in this town." If you tend to agree with this statement, you would circle the answer number under AGREE. Alternatively, you can indicate how much you AGREE 0R DISAGREE with each statement. Each question should be completed by circling one of the available choices or options (See Appendix A for a sample survey of XYZ Company).

An important step in the Survey Design is to try to assure that the questions are clearly written and understood by the respondents. Brickman and Rog (2009) mention that there are three main kinds of pre-survey question evaluation activities: 1) using checklists to systematically review questions; 2) conducting cognitive interviews; and 3) field pretesting (replicating to a reasonable extent procedures to be used in a proposed survey). For this purpose, the administrators can choose a cognitive interview approach and a field testing technique. A number of small groups of sample respondents are asked to review each question, discuss interpretations, verify and finally make modifications. Another round of sample respondents should be surveyed to ensure there is clarity in understanding each of the questions. Two field pretests should be conducted replicating procedures that would be used in the survey process itself. As part of the evaluation of the questions, the sample of respondents can be asked how they would prefer the analysis of the questions to be presented.

Survey research suggests adding a biographical section in the event that questions arise that the Team Leader may have to research. An example might be: "do the males feel the same way as the females"? Be certain to tell the employees why this section is there and how it may be used. If the work group is less than 20 or if anyone feels that they may be identified based on their answers for gender, age, or race, then it may be advisable not to include it or make it optional. The placement of this section is up to the survey designers and the researcher's needs. Some employees may feel threatened to fill out a survey and be asked personal questions that might link them with certain answers based on their age or gender, especially if they are the only one in the department in that category; therefore, the authors suggest that this section be placed at the conclusion of the survey, again with the instructions that if they are uncomfortable they do not have to complete it.

Administration

Self administered questionnaires require a great deal of preparation. Self-administered surveys typically provide a high degree of anonymity and confidentiality and are often the method of choice for surveys containing sensitive items (Edwards et al., 1997). The department/unit manager should personally meet with all survey respondents to explain the purpose and use of the survey. Great emphasis should be placed on the anonymity or confidentiality of their responses and that the survey is voluntary. Explicit explanations of the steps involved in the survey process should be shared. It is recommended that the Program Administrator be present and introduced and be open to answering any questions. The

preparation of this meeting is very important and can be a deciding factor in many employees' minds as to the worth and sincerity of the survey.

It is recommended that the survey be administered on company time and in a private office, preferably with a door. Prior to the survey administration, great care should be given by management that opinions expressed by the respondents are not to be taken personally or used against the respondents in any way (Edwards et al., 1997).

Data Analysis and feedback

After the surveys have been completed, the Project Leader should summarize the results for all items in each section, by individual department/work unit, and a total score for each section should be provided.

Feedback is a critical step in the methodology of this proposed survey technique, as the reasoning to the satisfaction/dissatisfaction scores lies in the employee's perceptions. To arrive at the employee's perceptions and suggestions for improvement is the key to the success of the proposed methodology. The feedback methodology can lead to the success of the proposed survey technique. It is critical that this session be held in a private area. It is recommended that only the employees of the surveyed work group and the Team Leader be present. Use this session to validate the data. This is necessary due to the fact that all respondents may not have interpreted the questions in the same manner. The Team Leader should then explain how the results will be presented. One easily understood method might be to present the feedback via a power point presentation dealing with each element (as demonstrated in Table 1).

Table 1 – Sample of Results for Presentation					
1. Teamwork	Satisfied	Dissatisfied			
111: All levels in my department or staff work together as a team.	30%	70%			

A presentation and discussion can lead to quick identification of problem areas. The key to deal with the obvious problems would be to do two things. 1. Talk about the situation. The Project Leader should probe for impressions and causes. 2. Most importantly, the project leader can ask the employees for suggestions on what can be done to correct the situation. Herein is the true value of administration of this in-house survey. The Project Leader must describe, in detail, the remarks to steps 1 and 2. Now, the Project Leader is prepared to provide management with some areas of concern and the employees' feedback to address them. Most importantly, this is the key to the successful utilization of an employee attitude survey to assess organization climate. It has been the authors' experience to not go to management with issues and concerns without proposed solutions. So offer a summary of the findings along with some recommendations to managers and organizational leaders.

Summary

In today's global workforce, it is imperative that all levels of employees of an organization work together as a team; gone are the days of individualism. In order for teamwork to happen, open communication and understanding of the different values, needs, and desires of

all groups of employees, across the organization, is essential. This is especially true in view of the various generations that comprise an organization's workforce, each with different values and expectations.

It is imperative that management be proactive. An Employee Attitude Survey is a very practical tool to help achieve this goal. However, managers must realize that using this instrument means continuous dedication and commitment from the top management down. Time intervals of administration are up to management. The intent in adopting this instrument is a serious commitment to listen and react to the survey results. Not doing so would foster a lack of trust and commitment of management by employees. Feedback of survey results is the most critical, the sooner the better. If designed well and used properly, Employee Attitude Survey can be a very useful tool for any organization to identify problem areas and include the employees in helping to resolve ongoing, new, and competitive challenges. The following questions and answers provide a summary of the basic concepts for review Organizational Climate Survey (also known as Employee Attitude Survey).

- What is an Organizational Climate Survey?
 Answer An Organizational Climate Survey can be seen as an employee opinion survey designed to ascertain the opinions/suggestions regarding current topics/issues relevant to the Human Resources Department or of the issuing manager/department.
- 2. What are the benefits to an organization to adopt the use of such a Survey? Answer The inclusion of employee's ideas/suggestions to assist in dealing with current organizational/departmental issues/concerns.
- 3. Who should choose the pilot department/unit?

 Answer The Human Resource Department in conjunction with department management requesting the survey.
- 4. How should the introduction of the use of the Survey be done and by whom?

 Answer The Human Resource Manager, the Department / Unit Manager, the Team Leader, and/or the Program Leader in conjunction with either of the two aforementioned.
- 5. Who should choose the Program Leader?
 Answer The Human Resource Manager/the Department/Unit Manager.
- 6. What criteria of competency should be used in selecting a Program Leader?

 Answer The Program Leader should be respected as competent, articulate, having excellent organizational skills, and the ability to keep a group focused.
- 7. Should the Survey be given in a group setting, led by the Program Leader, or online? Answer –Both avenues have their advantages but the authors recommend that the survey administration be led by the Program Leader, especially if this is the first survey given by the human resources department or organization. This approach is more personal and allows for questions and answers.
- 8. To whom should the completed Survey be returned to?

- Answer If online administration is chosen, the completed surveys should be returned to the person who sent the Survey. If a Program Leader is chosen, the completed surveys should be returned to that person.
- 9. If using an online administration format, how much time should be allowed for completion and submission?
 - Answer That may best be determined by a pilot of the Survey, via online, to several groups of employees.

If organizations are going to succeed and grow in this competitive global economy, it is paramount that employees and managers work together as a team. Managers should appreciate and thank everyone for their cooperation. The results of the survey should be compiled as soon as possible and provide a detailed itemized analysis. The results should be very easy to understand and identify strong and weak areas along with specific suggestions on how to build upon them.

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APPENDIX A – XYZ ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to measure the attitudes, opinions, and work environment from the employee's point of view. Respond to each question as honestly as you can so your answers, along with those of your colleagues, will provide a good measure of the value of work life at this location. The best answer is always just what you think or feel. Your answers will be completely confidential and, except for the survey administrator, no one else will receive individualized results. This survey asks how you see and feel about many things which have to do with your work. This is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers.

Some words in the survey have special meanings you need to know. The definitions of some terms for the purpose of this survey are as follows:

- a. "BOSS," "SUPERVISOR" means that person you usually work for directly.
- b. "WORK GROUP" refers to those who work for the same boss.
- c. "HERE," "AROUND HERE," "THIS PLACE," or "IN MY AREA" means your place of work as a whole (entire unit, department, office, and so forth).
- d. "MANAGEMENT," "HIGHER-UPS," "HIGHER MANAGEMENT," and "HIGHER LEVELS" mean all levels of supervision/management including your immediate boss.
- e. "DEPARTMENT" means people interactions only within Claim Operations.

To answer clearly what you think or feel about each item, please follow these steps:

- 1. Read each item fully before you start to mark your answer.
- 2. Pick the one answer which most nearly says what you think or how you feel.
- 3. While completing the questions, be sure to read the special instructions which are included.

All questions can be completed by circling one of the options. Select one answer from the choices stated that best matches what you think about the item. For example: "I enjoy the weather in this town." If you tend to agree with this statement, you would circle the answer number under AGREE. Indicate your selection according to the following scale:

- 5) Strongly Disagree;
- 4) Disagree;
- 3) Neither Agree nor Disagree;
- 2) Agree;
- 1) Strongly Agree.

Please indicate how much you \underline{AGREE} or $\underline{DISAGREE}$ with each statement. Each question should be completed by circling \underline{one} of the answer numbers.

I. Teamwork:

111	All levels in my department or sta	aff w	ork together as	1	2	3	4	5	
112	There is a "teamwork spirit" amor work group.	ng th	nose in my	1	2	3	4	5	
113	Those in my work group are usua with a work problem.	1	2	3	4	5			
114	The people I work with cooperate	to g	et the job done.	1	2	3	4	5	
115	Around here, work groups or departagainst each other.	1	2	3	4	5			
116	In my area, work groups or depart each other plan their work together	1	2	3	4	5			
117	In my area, my work performance teamwork between departments o			1	2	3	4	5	
<i>2</i> .	Communications:								
211	There is a free and open flow of v to me from higher levels.	vork	information down	1	2	3	4	5	
212	There is a free and open flow of vupward from me to higher levels.	1	2	3	4	5			
213	Those in my work group get enou higher-ups how we feel about thir	1	2	3	4	5			
214	Around here, there is a free and open flow of information between the different work groups or departments.				2	3	4	5	
215	I am told enough to help me see v the way they are here.	1	2	3	4	5			
216	The information I get arrives in ti	me to	o help me.	1	2	3	4	5	
217	I have enough information to do my job well.					3	4	5	
218	The information I get from management is true.					3	4	5	
219	Higher-ups in this place seriously at my level have to say.	1 1	2 2	3	4	5			
220	Around here, we are not afraid to say what we really think.				2	3	4	5	
221	Sufficient effort is made by higher management to get the opinions of those who work here.				2	3	4	5	
222	I always know what I must accom		h on my job.	1	2	3	4	5	
223	My departments (or area's) work								
	O Always	O	Seldom						
	O Most of the time	O	Never						
	O Some of the time								
224	I am kept informed on how well my own department area performs.								
	O Always								
	O Most of the time	O	Never						

O Some of the time

<i>3</i> .	Managerial Style:					
311	Information we get about our work is used to criticize people	1	2	3	4	5
	more than to improve operations.					
312	When a mistake is made, the style is "criticize first and get the	1	2	3	4	5
	facts later."					
313	An employee here is usually wise to hide mistakes from	1	2	3	4	5
_	management since his/her future may be at stake.					
4.	Independency:	_		•		_
411	I am able to change the structure and control of my	1	2	3	4	5
	own work.	_		•		_
412	I have sufficient say in setting my work goals.	1	2 2	3	4	5 5
413	I would do my job better if I had more freedom to act	1	2	3	4	5
_	on my own.					
<i>5</i> .	Contribution-Attitude:	1	2	2	4	_
511	My job makes good use of my skills and abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
512	My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment.	1	2 2	3	4	5
513	On my job, I have a chance to do some things that really test my	1	2	3	4	5
51 <i>1</i>	ability.	1	2	2	4	_
514	I am less productive than I used to be.	1	2	3	4	5
515	My work group is very productive.	1	2 2	3	4 4	5 5
516	My work group puts all of their effort into their job.	1	_	_	4	3
517	From the list below, mark (O) only three conditions or factors whi	cn you	ieei w	ouia		
	contribute the most to improving your productivity:					
	O Improved supervisory relations O Changes in supplies tools againment					
	O Changes in supplies, tools, equipmentO More freedom					
	O More authority O More and better information					
	O Changes in work environment					
	O Clearer responsibilities					
	O Additional manpower					
	O Better planning					
	O More cooperation from other areas or departments					
	O Other					
	O other					
518	If the above changes were made, my productivity could be	1	2	3	4	5
510	improved by%.	-	_	3	•	2
519	In my area, we stick with the old ways of doing things.	1	2	3	4	5
520	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		2	3	4	5
52 0	working hard.	1	_	J	•	Ü
521	In my area, people get rewarded by how well they do their jobs.	1	2	3	4	5
522	My pay depends mostly upon how well I do my job.	1	2	3	4	5
523	I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in	1	2	3	4	5
	this company.	-	_		•	-
	rr,					

524	My job assignments change	so often th	nat my performance suffers.								
	O Always	O	Seldom								
	O Most of the time	O	Never								
	O Some of the time										
525	How satisfied are you with	your oppor	tunity to get a better job with	this o	compa	ny?					
	O Very satisfied			,							
	O Satisfied	O	Very dissatisfied								
	O Neither satisfied nor di	,									
526	How satisfied are you with the training you received for doing your present job?										
	O Very satisfied	1	3								
	O Satisfied	O	Very dissatisfied								
	O Neither satisfied nor di	issatisfied	,								
527	Have you applied for promotional opportunities within the company in the past:										
	O 6 months	0	7-12 months	,	1						
	O 13-18 months	0	Over 19 months								
	O No										
6.	Supervisory Relationships:							_			
611	I can honestly tell my boss		•	1 1	2 2	3	4	5			
612	My boss accepts constructive criticism from his/her subordinates.					3	4	5 5 5			
613	When I make a serious mist	1	2	3	4	5					
	go to my boss for help.			1	2						
614	My boss deals fairly with everyone.					3	4	5 5 5			
615	•					3	4	5			
616	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •					3	4	5			
617	in his/her group. My boss maintains high standards of performance.					3	4	5			
<i>7</i> .	Job And Work Attitudes:	nauras or p	orrormance.	1	2	J	·				
711	Considering everything, how satisfied are you with					3	4	5			
712	your job? How satisfied are you with	the informs	ation you receive from	1	2	3	4	5			
/12	management on what's goir			1	_	3	-	_			
713	Overall, rate your satisfaction	1	2	3	4	5					
	operates.		<i>y y E</i>								
714	Considering everything, how would you rate your satisfaction					3	4	5			
	with your department/unit?	•	•								
715	Considering everything, how would you rate your					3	4	5			
	current satisfaction in your										
716	As a place to work, things a			1	2	3	4	5			
	to be getting better.										
717	I recommend XYZ Company to my friends.					3	4	5			
718	I would recommend XYZ C	•		1 1	2 2	3	4	5			
	to work.	1 2									
719	I defend XYZ Company wh	nen I hear s	omeone	1	2	3	4	5			
	criticizing it										

Demographic Questions:

The following biographical information is requested so that meaningful analysis and comparisons of group results can be made. Please check the circle, O, corresponding to your answer.

AGE GROUP		COMPANY SERV	<u>ICE</u>	SALARY GRADE	
Under 20 years	O	Under 1 year	O	Write as relevant	
20-24 years	O	1-2 years	O		O
25-29 years	O	3-5 years	O		O
30-34 years	O	6-10 years	O		O
35-39 years	O	11-15 years	O		O
40-44 years	O	16-20 years	O		
45-49 years	O	21-25 years	O		
50-54 years	O	26-30 years	O		
55 years or more	O	31 years & over	O		
TIME ON CURRE	NT				
JOB ASSIGNMENT	¬ <u>-</u>	JOB TITLE		<u>SEX</u>	
Under 6 months	O	Write as relevant		Male	Ο
6 months - 1 year	O		O	Female	O
1-2 years	O		O		
2-3 years	O		O	MARITAL STATUS	<u>S</u>
3-4 years	O		O	Unmarried	Ο
4-5 years	O			Married	O
Over 5 years	O				