Eight tips for an effective ethics and compliance survey

By Adam Balfour

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Employee feedback is incredibly important to understand what is going on in the organization, how employees feel, and whether the ethics and compliance program is working effectively and as intended. There are a variety of ways in which you can get feedback from employees—both formally and informally—and one way to do so is through online surveys, which can be created internally or with the paid support of external consultants. Whether you choose to conduct surveys internally or with external support, here are key points to consider in designing an effective and useful employee survey on ethics and compliance.

Is an online survey the best way to get feedback?

Before jumping in and launching the survey, it is important to consider whether an online survey is the best way to get the feedback you are looking for. Online surveys, as will be discussed, tend to require people to select from multiple-choice answers and do not allow for real discussion if the responder has different ideas or doesn't feel that any of the answers fit. Before asking your employees to collectively invest a large amount of time to complete a survey (as well as spending your time and possibly company funds), make sure that an online survey is the best approach and will provide the feedback you are looking for.

What is the purpose of the survey?

It is important to think about why you are conducting the survey and what you hope to achieve. Are you looking to conduct a general survey about culture, or do you need to focus on a particular topic (e.g., harassment or discrimination)? Are you looking for factual feedback (e.g., "How often does your manager talk about ethics and compliance?") or feedback based on perception (e.g., "How comfortable do you think other employees would feel about speaking up?")? A key point to consider with each individual question in a survey is, "However employees respond to this question, what will I do with the feedback, and will the feedback be actionable?" Asking a broad group of employees whether they have all read and understood a particular policy that only applies to a small number of employees is not likely to produce actionable feedback. If the survey feedback is not actionable and you do not act on the feedback, then employees are unlikely to want to complete another survey in the future.

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