

February 5, 2002

# The Business Research Lab



More than just data . . . we provide *understanding* for smart business decisions

Welcome to The Business Research Lab's  
Employee Satisfaction Research eNewsletter

## Online Employee Satisfaction Surveys

Lessons From the Trenches - By Clive Mettrick

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We've been conducting employee satisfaction surveys online for five years now. I thought it was interesting to publish some of what we've learned about this methodology.

### Superior Response Rates

Our average response rate for employee satisfaction surveys conducted online has been approximately 75% compared to 65% for the traditional "paper and pencil" methodology. It is not unusual for us to experience response rates in the 80% to 90% or higher range (we've had 100% response rates on several occasions). High tech and small firms tend to have the highest response rates.

### More Robust Comments

Comments made by online participants tend to be twice as long as those made by those responding on paper for recent studies – 66 words on average for the online methodology versus an average of 33 words for those responding on paper. Combined with the comment analysis and categorization given sufficient sample size, this enables management to gain more insight into employee's thoughts.

### Reminders Are Still Needed

Three to four days after the initial invitation to participate in an online survey, employee responses reduce to a trickle. A reminder after four days has an

immediate impact on boosting response rates, as does a second or third reminder. Reminders always have been an important part of research; online reminders have sped up the process considerably.

### What Happened to Grade School Grammar?

One of the challenges we have with paper surveys is the ability to decipher handwriting. When we began conducting many of our surveys online, we anticipated cost savings through not having to transcribe and decipher respondent's handwriting. While we have experienced some cost reductions, we did not anticipate that it would take longer to spell-check online comments. Many of our online comments read something like this: "i think u shood..."

### Easier Detection and Prevention of Multiple Responses

The use of "cookies" has prevented people from responding more than one time to an online survey. Tech-savvy people know how to get around this. However, if they try to "stack the deck", their tendency is to just "resubmit" most or all of their first responses. This usually occurs within two minutes of the initial responses, and is much easier to detect and

eliminate than when people attempt to complete and mail multiple paper surveys.

### Not Everyone Ready For "Primetime" ---Yet!

Although many people are "Web savvy," there still are organizations ("Organisations for our Canadian and UK readers) that need to conduct paper surveys. When kiosks have been up (with "non-cookies" surveys) to enable those without web access, we have found some ethnic groups tend to be under-represented; more people tend to "submit" multiple times, and a more than usual percentage of surveys were submitted before being fully completed. One solution has been to offer web surveys to employees with web access and paper surveys to all others.

### Clients Still Need a "Personal Touch"

We know that some competitors offer "Build Your Own Surveys" on the Web for next to nothing (or for nothing). The adage: "You get what you pay for" still applies. You have to ask the right questions, in the right way, and properly interpret the findings in order to have actionable results. The online survey process can seem daunting to those who have never conducted one. We have established a smooth process of programming, testing, respondent invitation, and response updates that takes the weight off the shoulders of our clients.

# In The Spotlight – Extraction Systems Inc.

## Breaking the Mold in Conventional Management Thinking

By Gregg Campa

“The company [Extraction Systems] showed significant improvements in all categories and its results are now in the top 15% of companies surveyed.”

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Headquartered in Franklin, Massachusetts, [Extraction Systems, Inc.](#) manufactures and markets a wide array of contamination measurement and control products for ultra clean environments.

The Business Research Lab surveyed the employees of Extraction Systems in December 2000. Compared with our norms, overall satisfaction was marginally above average. Although ratings in many specific areas were above average, there were also several below average areas including satisfaction with the benefits package; willingness to recommend the company to a friend seeking employment and corporate communications. In our report, we wrote: “Improvements in these areas promise to substantially improve overall satisfaction in the future. We should note that while improvement in these areas would bode well for improving employee satisfaction, Extraction Systems’ ratings were above the average in most areas.”

When the employees were re-surveyed in December 2001, overall satisfaction had increased by a remarkable thirteen percentage points. The company showed significant improvements

in all categories and its results are now in the top 15% of companies surveyed. More importantly, the areas that were noted as needing improvement in December 2000 improved as well. Satisfaction with the overall benefits package increased 17%. Employees willingness to recommend Extraction Systems to a friend improved 20%, satisfaction with corporate communication frequency increased 17%, and satisfaction with its informativeness increased 24%.

We asked Devon Kinkead- Chief Executive Officer of Extraction Systems, Patricia Deziel-Director of Finance and Administrator at Extraction Systems, and Van Latham, Ph.D.-PathPoint Consulting to explain the company’s attitude toward employee satisfaction.

**Extraction:** *Clearly, satisfied and happy employees translate into satisfied customers and shareholders. Based on this fundamental management principle, we have redirected our focus on ensuring that the satisfaction of our employees comes before the customer, embracing the mantra: ‘The customer comes second,’ behind our employees. Logically, it is impossible to satisfy customers with unsatisfied*

*employees. Besides, who wants to create, or work 40-60 hours/week in an untenable environment?*

**The Lab:** Satisfaction with corporate communications improved significantly in 2001. Most employees — significantly more than in other companies — say they understand corporate strategy, feel corporate communications are frequent enough, and believe corporate communications keep them informed (See graph). What did Extraction do to improve communication among its employees?

**Extraction:** *Extraction has always been an open information company... meaning that all information, except employee files, are available to anyone, at any time. We probably accelerated that openness in 2001, which may have helped our corporate communication scores. However, I think the reason that we made significant overall improvements in employee satisfaction (ESAT) in 2001 was because we measured satisfaction in 2000, presented the results to everyone at the beginning of 2001, identified the areas that we would fix, fixed them, and therein created credibility in the feedback process with our people.*

## Extraction Systems, Inc.- Continued

**The Lab:** In recent years, companies have focused much of their compensation efforts around employee benefits as a way to attract, hire, and retain high quality employees. Based on your most recent satisfaction survey, you clearly have made a concerted effort to improve your benefits package. Satisfaction with the overall package increased significantly in 2001. How did Extraction Systems attack this issue?

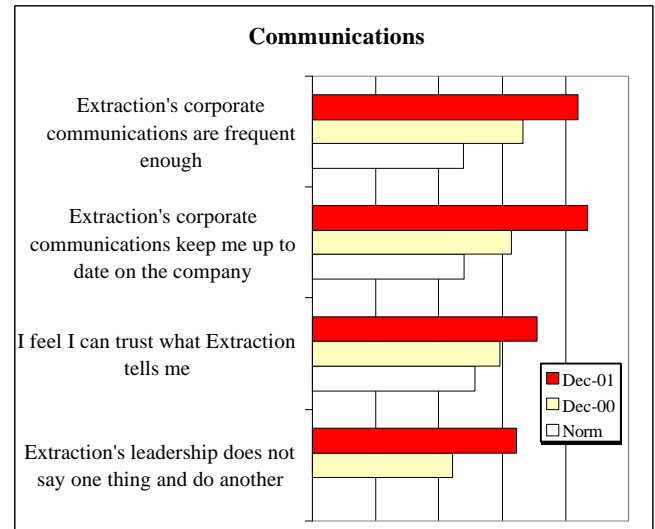
**Extraction:** *We benchmarked our benefits package with other companies to provide us a framework to improve upon. Based on this study, we then set out to add benefits not previously offered as part of our existing benefits program and improve those parts of the package that we felt were below the average of the firms we benchmarked. It was important that any changes made to the benefits plan must be driven by employee satisfaction and what is competitive. With this in mind, the Human Resource and Finance departments developed a new benefits philosophy and plan called the **Plan to Live Well** program which starts with company paid personal financial planning and ends with a benefit suite that enables our people to take action on their personal*

*financial plans in the most tax efficient manner.*

**The Lab:** Many executives like to quantify improvements in employee satisfaction levels in terms of a reduction in employee turnover, increased productivity, or greater company profitability. What is Extraction Systems' "yardstick" for measuring company performance against employee satisfaction levels?

**Extraction:** *Accurate measurement of the impact of employee satisfaction levels on company performance probably 'defies analysis.' Perhaps in the future, once we collect a more significant data set, we will be able to correlate ESAT improvement to Extraction's organizational performance. But, the statistics aren't terribly important because deductively, one cannot reason that one can drive up customer satisfaction levels with unsatisfied employees. Moreover, given the financial value of customer loyalty in these days of intense competition, it is difficult to argue that one can, in the long term, grow profits without maintaining a very high level of customer satisfaction.*

There is little doubt about the pervasive role happy employees play at Extraction. It helps drives the company's strategic vision and



direction. It is so critical to the company that action plans devoted entirely to employee satisfaction have become an integral part of the company's yearly business plan. This unwavering commitment explains why the company is in the top 15% of all companies surveyed. According to Kinkead, "No longer can the measurement of employee satisfaction be merely an HR function. ESAT improvement is, at the most fundamental level, an executive management credibility issue. If senior management isn't trying to improve ESAT, then they probably aren't listening to their people either, and that is a very dangerous path!"

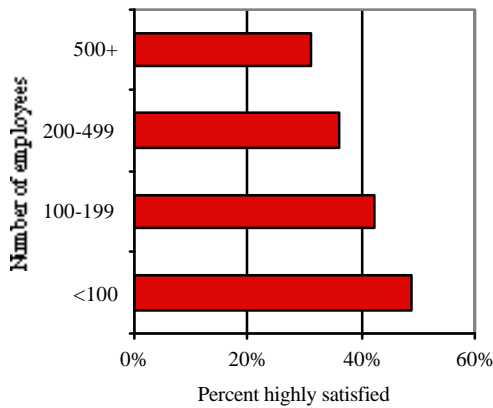
If you are looking for a company that is genuinely concerned about the welfare of its employees or interested in getting more information on Extraction Systems' products and services, please visit their website at <http://www.extractionssystemsync.com/>.

PathPoint Consulting is a human resources consulting firm specializing in the custom design of leadership and organizational development products, interventions, and solutions. For more information on PathPoint Consulting's products and services, please visit their website at <http://www.pathpointconsulting.com>

## Big Company Blues? – by Don Payne

### Employees in Large Companies Lower in Satisfaction

BRL's analysis of employee satisfaction surveys shows that satisfaction is lower in companies with 500 or more employees than in companies with fewer than 100 employees.



Some of the differences may be what you'd expect. In large companies employees feel more distant from management. Fewer of them have confidence in management, believe they can trust what management tells them, or feel they are valued.

Other differences, however, are somewhat surprising. Employees in large companies, for example, are less confident about their job security. And there are some areas in which there's no difference at all in satisfaction between employees in large and small companies. They're equally high in satisfaction with the training their company provides, and in liking the people they work with.

However, as Clive Mettrick of The Business Research Lab points out, "Size is no guaranty of results, one way or the other. We have large clients whose employees give them high ratings -- and being small doesn't mean you're home free. There's a wide variation in satisfaction among small companies."

Survey data bear this out. Overall satisfaction in companies with fewer than 100 employees ranged from a low of 11% to a high of 80%. Plainly, an 11% level of satisfaction is a sign of trouble, no matter what the company size.

In short, large or small, it pays to find out where you stand with your employees.

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## The "Good Boss/Bad Boss" Chronicles–

### True Stories From The BRL Collection

Edited by Gregg Campa

#### The Bad Boss – *Short, Fat, and Balding*

I worked for three weeks as an administrative assistant in a small Air Conditioning Servicing Company. My boss was the nastiest man I have ever met. Nothing I ever did was correct; he would listen in on my phone calls (all business) by hiding behind a pillar in the office and did not allow me to eat lunch at the same time as other employees in the company. The final straw for me was the day that he told me; "you would be a much cuter girl if you just lost some weight." I was subsequently fired when I responded that "I may not be thin, but I can lose weight and you will always

be shorter than I am and your hair will not grow back." He asked me to leave immediately and I gladly packed my things and left.

#### The Bad Boss – *The Sicky*

I worked, as a secretary, for the V.P. of Finance. This guy had the manners and social skills of a gnat. One afternoon (after only working there for about four days) I was sitting in his office taking dictation and doing the "to do" list and right in the middle of speaking he picked up his trashcan and vomited in it! He put his head way in deep; however, I still knew what was happening. I got

up to leave (to give him some privacy) and, with his head still in the trashcan, he motioned for me to sit down he would be "just a minute".  
*Yuck!*

#### The Good Grateful Boss and Employee

I am a middle-aged woman working as an Administrative Assistant. I was recently offered the opportunity to advance in my company by becoming the assistant to the National Accounts Director; however, along with my duties to this new boss, I would continue to have responsibilities to others in my office. I accepted the position, but

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### The Good Grateful Boss and Employee -Continued

I was nervous about a few things: first, I was concerned because my new boss was 25 years younger than I am, and she is a woman. I had never worked for a woman before, let alone a much younger one, and I honestly hadn't heard any great "boss stories" from anyone who had! My second concern was the division of my duties. Well, let me tell you, all of my fears were groundless. My boss is a dynamo. She works very long hours and does very detailed and technical work, but she never forgets to tell me how much she appreciates me. If I have stayed on long after my regular eight-hour day she thanks me profusely and has even treated me to dinner. She often will come to me with photocopying jobs, and upon finding me busy with other peoples' work, she just rolls up her sleeves and does it herself - she's not above doing "menial" tasks!

She is a real team player, and sees our work as "our work" rather than a division of duties. She is a true example of one who leads by example. I am proud to work for her and with her, and I believe that the fine working environment she creates enhances the quality of work we produce.

### A Family of Good Bosses

I work for a family owned business. I consider anyone in the family my boss because each is an owner. In the scope of "mom & pop" type businesses, we are fairly large. We have over 80 employees.

When the family owner-managers at my company get wind of unhappy employees they make changes not just for that individual, but also for the whole company. They keep up to date on other businesses and institute

programs when they apply.

For example, my boss read about local corporations providing low cost nutritious food as a way to keep employees happy and instituted an upscale deli with reasonable prices and the option to have the cost taken out of your check. Since they instituted this, I no longer work through my lunch because I don't have to go anywhere. I don't go hungry which can affect my work performance.

Also, there was some dissatisfaction and grumbling about whose pockets the profits were going into. My bosses instituted an open-book management policy. Now all company income and expenses are reviewed in monthly meetings. They aren't keeping any secrets, which makes me feel like a bigger part of bottom line.

Do you have a good boss/bad boss story? Ever had one? Would you like to earn \$10? If you'd like to tell the world about your experience, e-mail us at [thelab@busreslab.com](mailto:thelab@busreslab.com). If we like the story, we'll print it on our websites. If we print it, we'll pay you \$10. Please include your name and address for the purposes of mailing a check. If we use your story . . . rest assured that we won't include either in the web site.

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