



# Employee Engagement 2.0

## Conducting Privacy-friendly Employee Engagement Surveys

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### I. Engagement Surveys – An Overview of their Background and Context

1. Employee surveys are a staple in employee engagement management techniques. They are used by modern employers to determine the issues of concern and interest to their employees, their relationship to their employer, their level of satisfaction and engagement, and the changes, if any, that their employees desire.
2. Paper-based employee surveys are a method of the past only rarely used today; instead, modern web-based systems allow for swift and comprehensive surveys and for a straightforward, yet meaningful analysis of the results. Employers can, however, secure broad and substantial participation in their surveys, if they create an atmosphere of trust wherein their employees may rely on anonymity and privacy in completing the survey, and where they know they will not be retaliated against because of an open and honest feedback.
3. This article provides guidance on how to conduct electronic on-line surveys in a privacy-friendly fashion and in compliance with general data privacy principles and requirements. It should be noted, however, that in addition to the common and general requirements outlined in this article, local legal regulations may impose additional requirements, and such requirements are outside the scope hereof.

### II. The Selection of the Survey System of Choice

1. Survey systems may be hosted inside or outside the IT infrastructure of the employer.
2. Internal survey systems offer the advantage of being under direct control of the employer's IT department and may be easier to customise to fit the needs of a particular survey, both in appearance and in survey and analysis methodology. Employees, however, may doubt whether surveys conducted internally are truly anonymous and whether it may be possible, albeit through improper channels,

to trace individual respondents. This issue is exacerbated by the need to authenticate, for instance through a username and password, before accessing intranet resources, and if existing systems are used improperly, in poorly implemented groupware and collaboration environments, for example, the survey and its respondents could become public inadvertently. Privacy regulations require that surveys conducted in an anonymous fashion must be protected through technical and organisational means against improper disclosure of results and against the association of the respondents with their responses. These requirements need to be carefully observed when using internal survey resources.

3. External survey systems offer the advantage of often being highly customisable and attuned to the specific needs of surveys, for instance through validation and branching logic and through the ability to interact with the employee based on the responses given by them or even various groups they belong to.
  - a) External survey systems are often more credible as truly anonymous to the employees as they will more readily accept the assertion that the survey provider will provide only data to the employee that has been previously identified and agreed upon. In turn, contractual relationships with external survey systems providers are often more difficult to manage. Contract data processing agreements must be concluded, and in countries like Germany where there exists a statutory duty for the data controller to audit the technical and organisational security measures of the data processors on behalf, such audits need to be completed before processing begins. If the survey provider is located outside the European Economic Area or the European Union, and is not registered with the US Safe Harbour programme, the standard contractual clauses must be implemented, and, depending on local requirements, a registration with or approval by the supervisory authorities may be required.
  - b) Care should be taken in case survey services are offered free of charge; in many cases, the terms and conditions underlying