

# NEEDS VERSUS WANTS ANALYSIS

## Chapter Objectives

- Learn about survey techniques
- Learn about individual interviews
- See how to interpret survey information
- Learn how to make recommendations from data

## Tools

- Sample Needs Versus Wants Survey

## Chapter Questions

- What is a needs versus wants survey?
- How is it conducted?
- Who should do it and how to interpret results?

## What Is a Needs Versus Wants Survey?

This type of analysis identifies training needs that are related to the organization's business. Training is linked to the bottom line, and providing appropriate training will benefit the individual as well as the organization.

It is often difficult for individuals to distinguish between what training they *need* to improve specific skill areas related to a business and training that they *want* or would like to complete that fills other needs, both personal and professional. For example, an individual might *want* to take a course in computer graphics, but may not *need* to use this skill in a current job.

## How Is It Conducted?

Prior to conducting a survey, interview a few of the target population for their comments about their work and ask them to offer suggestions for training. Following is a sample list of questions to ask of supervisors about their current job practices and performance. The consultant asking questions makes notes of the supervisor's answers during individual or group interviews. A summary of their comments follows later in this chapter. After an interview, circulate a written survey to sort out needs versus wants of the target population (supervisors in this example).

### Interview Questions

- How long have you been a supervisor?
- Are all supervisors promoted because they were high-performing employees or are some supervisors hired from outside the organization?
- What are the characteristics of a "good" supervisor?
- Describe your typical day.
- What do you like and dislike about your job?
- Are there any unusual circumstances that impact work right now? If so, what are they?
- What prior training have you had to develop supervisory skills?

- What issues or problems make it difficult for you to do your job well?
- What type of support do you get from management when dealing with your subordinates?
- How can management better support your work?
- What type of training would help you be a more effective supervisor?

It is most appropriate to survey more than two levels in the organization to obtain more than one point of view. Identify one level of employees who are the appropriate target audience for skill development, for example, front-line supervisors, as in the example above. Ask the supervisors what skills they need to meet their current responsibilities and what skills their peer group needs to complete their responsibilities more effectively. It may also be appropriate to survey the subordinates of those supervisors and perhaps their managers.

When more than two perspectives are used to identify training needs, the “wants” or personal desires are easily spotted and true training needs can be addressed.

Tool 5.1 is an example of a survey used to assess the training needs of a specific group of supervisors. The survey was given to supervisors, and another slightly modified survey was given to their subordinates. Supervisors were asked for their preferences in the “you” column and for the preferences of their peers in the “all other supervisors” column. It was appropriate for supervisors to rate their peers, since most had been working together for some time and were aware of strengths and weaknesses in their peers. When circulating a survey with course titles, provide a course description to give a common understanding of course content. List only those courses that an organization is prepared to offer. If a course is listed in a survey, then the expectation is that the course will be offered if enough employees request it. Sometimes a fourth area is assessed that lists technical job skills, such as “Inventory Software Training” or “Financial Skills.” In this example, no technical skills are listed, since all supervisors were promoted from within because of their excellent technical skills.



### Tool 5.1. Sample Needs Versus Wants Survey

**To All Supervisors:** Rank the following courses first, second, and third on the basis of how much benefit they would be to you and to other supervisors in our company. Do this for each of three skill areas in each column. You will have six groupings of first, second, and third choices. Please read course descriptions before making choices.

	You	All Other Supervisors
<b>Personal Skills (Rank 1st, 2nd, 3rd)</b>		
Active Listening	_____	_____
Oral Presentations	_____	_____
Personal Computer Skills	_____	_____
Problem Solving and Decision Making	_____	_____
Stress Management	_____	_____
Time Management	_____	_____
<b>Interpersonal Skills (Rank 1st, 2nd, 3rd)</b>		
Business Writing	_____	_____
Coaching and Counseling	_____	_____
Conflict Management	_____	_____
Dealing with Internal/External Customers	_____	_____
Effective Communication	_____	_____
Meeting Management	_____	_____
Motivation	_____	_____
Self-Directed Work Teams	_____	_____
Team Building	_____	_____
<b>Supervision Skills (Rank 1st, 2nd, 3rd)</b>		
Delegation	_____	_____
Goal Setting	_____	_____

### Tool 5.1. Sample Needs Versus Wants Survey, Cont'd

	You	All Other Supervisors
Labor Relations	_____	_____
Leadership and Empowerment	_____	_____
Managing Change	_____	_____
Performance Appraisal	_____	_____
Progressive Discipline	_____	_____
Selection Interviewing	_____	_____
Training Subordinates	_____	_____

What would help you become more effective and advance your career goals?

What is the biggest threat to your success as a supervisor?

\_\_\_\_\_

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The two questions listed at the bottom of the survey are asked to help identify additional needs not addressed in the courses listed in the survey and to identify other factors that could impact training. Generally, survey respondents give three types of answers to these questions. First, respondents say they are not threatened. This is a healthy answer for an organization. Second, respondents say they have made past mistakes that could be held against them. This is also a healthy answer that shows an interest in self-improvement. Third, respondents blame others for lack of success. This type of “victim” answer is not healthy for an organization. For example, a respondent could claim nepotism or others “don’t like him” or the manager “plays favorites.” However, when more than 5 percent of respondents blame others, no amount of training will ensure success in this organization. Other interventions besides training are needed to remedy this type of situation. For example, putting promotion policies in writing and clarifying the job posting process may be ways to address nepotism or favoritism issues.

Figure 5.1 is a sample summary of survey results and identifies the top three or four most-requested courses selected by three groups. A weighting system was

used to identify the top three or four requested courses. A course rated “1” was given 5 points; a course rated “2” was given 3 points; and a course rated “3” was given 1 point. When all the points for specific courses were totaled, the top three or four courses emerged. Raw points were not reported as part of the survey, since the objective was to identify the most frequently requested courses.

Twenty of the thirty supervisors in the target population were also interviewed after completing the survey. The remaining supervisors were not available because of vacations, shift timing, and schedule changes. The twenty-five supervisors also completed a written survey. Thirty-five percent of the assembly workers also completed a written survey. Upper management did not complete a survey and were the feedback group to whom the consultant reported the results. Only informal on-the-job training has been done for the supervisors by the managers to this point. Narrative survey comments from the supervisor and their subordinates follow Figure 5.1.

After reviewing the survey results and narrative comments, try to guess which four training programs management selected in this case. Then read the rationale for management’s decisions to select four training programs for this group and reflect their needs, rather than what they said they wanted.

**Figure 5.1. Example of Supervisory Development Survey Results**

Supervisors Say “I need . . .”	Other Supervisors Need . . .	Workers Say Supervisors Need . . .
<p><b>Personal Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time Management</li> <li>Problem Solving and Decision Making</li> <li>Stress Management</li> </ul>	<p><b>Personal Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time Management</li> <li>Active Listening</li> <li>Problem Solving and Decision Making</li> </ul>	<p><b>Personal Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Problem Solving and Decision Making</li> <li>Active Listening</li> <li>Time Management</li> </ul>
<p><b>Interpersonal Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coaching/Counseling</li> <li>Motivation</li> <li>Team Building</li> <li>Effective Communication</li> </ul>	<p><b>Interpersonal Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team Building</li> <li>Motivation</li> <li>Coaching/Counseling</li> </ul>	<p><b>Interpersonal Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team Building</li> <li>Effective Communication</li> <li>Motivation</li> <li>Conflict Management</li> </ul>
<p><b>Supervisory Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership Styles</li> <li>Training Subordinates</li> <li>Goal Setting</li> </ul>	<p><b>Supervisory Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Goal Setting</li> <li>Leadership Styles</li> <li>Training Subordinates</li> </ul>	<p><b>Supervisory Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership Styles</li> <li>Labor Relations</li> <li>Delegation</li> </ul>

**Comments from Supervisors**

“It’s pretty busy around here right now. I don’t know if there is any time to attend a training class. You know, I’ve been at this job and in this business for over twenty-five years.”

“I really have some trouble keeping the newer guys in line. If you give them an inch, they take a mile. I try to be patient, but if you don’t kick them a little, the work never gets done. It seems that I need to be everywhere at one time.”

“—is really a good manager to work for. You going to tell him I said that? He could listen a bit more to our problems. There is just too much overtime right now. Everything is a rush. I go home tired; I wake up tired. It’s not fun to come to work anymore the way it used to be.”

“The union is pretty good. But there are some guys who are always complaining about being singled out for discipline. I let them know right away what’s wrong and how to fix it. Are we really going to have some training? That would be great. The other guys really need the help.”

“How about not so much negative criticism? We occasionally hear about the good job we do, but there is never a comment on the small things. I’ve been in the same place for two years now. There is such pressure to catch up . . . all this overtime . . . my family just doesn’t understand the pressure or the career opportunity that can come from it.”

“I’d like to be able to spend more time with new people. There just never seems to be enough time to show them what’s expected and how to do it right.”

**Comments from Assembly Line Workers**

“It would really help my boss to listen before he climbs all over my case. I’d like some help from him—instead of him always trying to write someone up. He thinks he’s a real tough guy.”

“I’ve seen an improvement in communication in the last month. That’s the key to everything. We need more of that.”

“Supervisors need to get more done through the foreman. Give each foreman an area to be responsible for instead of trying to do everything

himself. This would free up your supervisors to make decisions, effect meaningful planning, and be more knowledgeable about all areas of the line.”

“Supervisors need to have a more positive attitude. They are kinda suspicious, most of the time. A little praise for a job well done would be appreciated.”

“In the past my supervisor has had a double standard. He’s also not very good at listening.”

“The supervisors are under constant and excessive pressure and lack understanding from upper management about what really goes on down here.”

“My supervisor lacks confidence. He changes his mind too easily.”

“Maybe asking questions before jumping to conclusions about what has and has not been done, and who did it.”

“More positive attitude toward labor relations.”

“Act on employees’ suggestions. Delegating more authority to us would create more harmony.”

## Who Should Do It and How to Interpret Results?

The needs assessor, often with a management group, will identify which are actual training *needs* and which are *wants* that ought not receive scarce training resources. In the example provided, the needs assessor met with the general manager and five senior managers of the supervisors to discuss the survey results. Here is the rationale for the top four courses this organization selected as a result of the survey.

When reviewing the survey results, it makes sense to consider workshops recommended by all three groups, such as “Time Management” or “Problem Solving and Decision Making.” The needs assessor asked the management group to explain whether or not the supervisors were disorganized and what might prompt a request for time management training. The managers said that there was a temporary increase in the workload and the time pressures for supervisors would fade away in a month or less when the group would be fully staffed. So even though supervisors *wanted* time management training,



it wasn't *needed*. Requests for time management are often symptoms of other needs.

It is not unusual for supervisors and their subordinates to identify the same need, but to "name it" as something different. The example in Figure 5.1 shows supervisors and their peers suggest that training in goal setting is a need. The subordinates recommend that supervisors be given training in labor relations. When supervisors have attempted to use collaborative goal-setting techniques, the subordinates suggest that the supervisors don't understand their labor contract. Workers think collaborative goal setting is inappropriate, since working conditions have already been negotiated by their union representatives. Both levels of employees surveyed were describing the same issue, but naming it differently from their own perspectives.

The four workshops selected by the management group for the supervisors included:

1. Leadership Skills
2. Effective Communication
3. Problem Solving and Decision Making
4. Motivation and Discipline

Since few of the supervisors had received any training for leading others, a "Leadership Skills" workshop was offered as the foundation for skill development. No communication skills had been offered to the group, so this was the second workshop along with some "Active Listening" skills. It is interesting that few individuals ever request listening skills training for themselves, while it is frequently recommended for others. At the end of the "Effective Communication" workshop, supervisors were asked by the trainer what types of problems they wanted addressed in the "Problem Solving and Decision Making" workshop. Most of the problems mentioned had to do with motivating subordinates and handling discipline in an assertive manner. With that additional information, the "Problem Solving and Decision Making" workshop was moved from the third workshop to the end of the sequence.

A few other classes might be considered as a *need* rather than a *want*. "Team Building" was considered by the management group as a possible workshop. However, since the supervisors had difficulty communicating effectively, "Team Building" was beyond the basic level *needed* by the supervisors.

By using survey information from three points of view and discussing the results with yet another level of employees (managers), the needs assessor was able to help management sort out the training *needs* from what the employees *wanted*. The four workshops were related to increasing the productivity and morale of the subordinates.

If you have completed a performance analysis, feasibility analysis, and needs versus wants analysis, then you are dealing with an issue that can be remedied by training. You can save the organization money if deficient performance is corrected and is definitely related to a business need. The next type of analysis to think about conducting is *goal analysis*. A goal analysis is appropriate to define the need in concrete and specific terms so the results of the training are clearly related to a business need.