GoldinKollar

Measurement

Employee survey tool or survey provider: pros, cons and how to choose

A tool is enough if you have someone who can design, analyse and get managers to act. A partner is worth it when trust is low or past surveys changed nothing.



GoldinKollar Research & Strategy · November 2026

The short answer: a survey tool on its own is enough when you have someone who can write good questions, protect anonymity, read results by group and get managers to act. Use a partner when trust is low, leaders need an outside read, or past surveys led to nothing. The tool collects answers. The value is in what follows.

A tool on its own, a partner, or both: how do they compare?

Option	Pros	Cons	Best when
A survey tool, run by your own team	Fast to start. You own the questions and the data. Low cost for each round	Needs skills inside: question design, analysis, minimum group sizes, action planning. Employees may doubt anonymity when HR holds the raw answers	You have an analyst, a simple question, and managers who act on results
A partner who runs the survey for you	Tested questions and method. An outside party holds the raw answers. Someone presents hard results to leaders. Help with the action step	Costs more for each round. Less flexible. You depend on their method, and you must check that your data stays yours if you leave	Trust is low, the stakes are high, or the last survey produced a report and nothing else
Your tool, with a partner for the hard parts	You keep the tool and the data. The partner designs, analyses or facilitates only where you lack skill	Needs a clear split, and someone inside who can manage it	You run surveys regularly and want a second pair of eyes on design and on action

What does the research say?

The research does not compare tools with partners. It is clear about what makes a survey worth running, and that points to the choice.

Action after the survey is the rare part. In Gallup's 2024 research, 8% of employees strongly agreed that their organisation takes action on surveys, and 38% said they did not know whether it takes any action at all.

Feedback without action plans does little. A three-year study of 1,236 employees compared groups that received survey feedback and made action plans, groups that received feedback only, and groups that received none. The group with action plans reported greater improvements in leadership factors and in commitment to the organisation. Sick leave did not differ between the groups (Björklund and colleagues, 2007).

Sharing results and stopping there is no better than silence. An eleven-year study of survey action planning at a multinational consumer products company builds on an earlier finding from the same kind of setting: when results were shared and nothing further was done, employee attitudes were about as favourable as among people who never saw the results, and both were much lower than among people who saw action (Church and colleagues, 2012).

Who does not answer matters. Survey researchers warn that results can be biased by non-response, and that the bias has to be checked, not assumed away (Rogelberg and Stanton, 2007).

So judge every option by one question: which one makes it most likely that each manager shares results and changes one thing? A partner who delivers a deck and leaves is no better than a tool.

When is a tool on its own enough?

- You have someone who can write neutral questions in Arabic and English and read the results by team.
- Your question is narrow: onboarding, a training programme, a canteen.
- Groups are large enough to report safely, and you will not report any group below your minimum.
- Managers already hold team meetings where results can be discussed.
- Employees believed the last survey was confidential.

If that is you, take our free employee survey templates and the survey sample size calculator and run it yourself.

When do you need a partner?

- The last survey ended in a presentation to leaders and no change that employees could name.
- People do not believe HR cannot see who said what. Our article on whether employee surveys are anonymous explains what you can honestly promise.
- The results will be uncomfortable, and they need to come from someone leaders cannot overrule.
- You need to compare sites, grades or nationalities and do not have an analyst.
- Scores have dropped and nobody can say why. A survey shows where. Finding the reason usually takes focus groups run by someone neutral.

What does each option cost in effort?

We do not publish prices. The effort looks like this.

- **Tool on its own:** choosing and translating the questions, building the survey, writing the invitation and two reminders, keeping it open about two weeks, cutting the data by group, writing a readout for each manager, and following up on actions. For a first full survey that is several weeks of work.
- **Partner:** scoping, an employee list with the groups you want to compare, approvals, and time from managers for the results sessions. The partner carries design, hosting, analysis and reporting.
- **Both:** as the first, minus the parts you hand over.

In every option the heaviest step is the one after the report: a conversation in every team and one change for each. Budget time for that first, then choose.

What should you ask a survey partner?

1. Who can see individual answers, and where is the data stored?
2. What is the smallest group you will report, and can we change it?
3. What does each manager receive, and when?
4. What do you do in the 90 days after the results?
5. Whose questions are these, and can we keep them and our data if we stop working with you?
6. How do you check whether the people who did not answer differ from those who did?

Our view

We run surveys and focus groups for clients, so weigh this page with that in mind.

Our own instrument, the GK Engagement Survey, asks people to choose between things they want instead of rating how satisfied they are. It takes about ten minutes on a phone in Arabic or English, and it ends in one action for each group with a named owner and a date. Our employee surveys page describes the full service, from the launch messages to a results session with your leadership team.

If you have an analyst and managers who act, a partner adds little. If your last three surveys changed nothing, a new tool will not fix that, and neither will we unless the action step is part of the plan.

Frequently asked questions

Is a survey run by a third party more anonymous?

It keeps individual answers out of the employer's systems, which helps people believe the promise. But anonymity comes from the design: no tracking links tied to names in the report, a minimum group size, and care with comments. A third party with a careless design is not safer.

Can we use a general form tool for an employee survey?

For a short survey in a small company, yes. Switch off anything that records names or email addresses, tell people what you switched off, and do not break results into groups small enough to identify someone. For a full engagement survey you will miss group reporting and trend tracking.

What does a survey partner do that a tool does not?

Four things: chooses and tests the questions, guards the raw answers, explains the results to leaders who would rather not hear them, and stays for the action step. If a partner offers only the first two, you are buying a tool with a logo.

How long does an employee survey take from launch to action?

Plan about two weeks of fieldwork with two reminders, then share what you heard within 30 days of closing, with one change each team can see. Much longer than that and people forget what they said.

Sources

- Gallup (2024), "How action plans propel engagement", 12 November 2024. gallup.com
- Björklund, C., Grahn, A., Jensen, I. and Bergström, G. (2007), "Does survey feedback enhance the psychosocial work environment and decrease sick leave?", *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 16(1), 76–93. doi.org
- Church, A. H., Golay, L. M., Rotolo, C. T., Tuller, M. D. and Desrosiers, E. I. (2012), "Without effort there can be no change: reexamining the impact of survey feedback and action planning on employee attitudes", *Research in Organizational Change and Development* 20, 223–264. doi.org0000020010)
- Rogelberg, S. G. and Stanton, J. M. (2007), "Introduction: understanding and dealing with organizational survey nonresponse", *Organizational Research Methods* 10(2), 195–209. doi.org

GoldinKollar™

Working on this in your company?

Tell us what you are trying to change. We reply within one business day, in Arabic or English.

goldinkollar.com/contact