

JOURNAL

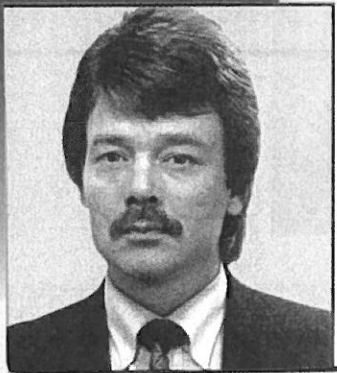
AMBULANCE INDUSTRY

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Mobile Health Care Services
It's All About People

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by Wayne W. Ruppert

Employee Job Satisfaction

Getting To The Bottom Line: Part I

Recently, I was chatting with the general manager of an ambulance service about problems which plagued his company. He stated, "every month we hire several new employees, and it never fails; as soon as we get them on board, more quit. My supervisors spend half of their time on the phone filling vacancies caused by call outs. And now there's talk of getting a union in here."

What he was describing were the obvious effects of low employee morale. Since employee morale affects performance, it should come as no surprise that if ignored, morale problems can wreak havoc on an organization. Areas commonly affected include:

- Operational efficiency, productivity, and quality of work.
- Employee interaction with patients, their families, hospitals, nursing homes, and the general public.
- How employees portray your organization in public.
- Employee work habits, absenteeism and turnover.
- Employee loyalty.
- Employee motivation; the desire to "go above and beyond the call of duty" if the need arises.

- Vehicles/equipment maintenance by employees.

No ambulance service is exempt from the adverse effects of employee morale problems, regardless of how well managed an organization. And, so we must rely on our management tools and skills to manage employee morale.

Dynamic Work Environment Survey Process

The Dynamic Work Environment Survey Process is a fast and simple way to learn about and quantify the needs and concerns of the total employee population. It works like this:

1. In confidential meetings, employees are encouraged to voice both positive and negative issues which effect their work environment and motivation.
2. These issues are transcribed into survey questions.
3. Each employee anonymously completes the survey, personally rating each issue.
4. The surveys are processed to yield a comprehensive, itemized and numerically scored list, reported in order from the most to the least pressing issue.

Identifying issues which are perceived to be problematic by employees is only part of managing employee morale. Obviously, the other part is to take action. Appropriate actions may range from providing a simple explanation to forming task forces which study issues and develop solutions. To simplify this phase, the survey process continues with:

5. Management categorizes each issue. (see Part II in the next *AIJ*)
6. Management communicates the survey and categorization results to the employees.
7. Problem Solving Task Forces (comprised of management and interested employees) are empowered to develop and implement plans to address specific issues.
8. Periodic progress reports are provided to all company personnel.
9. The survey process is repeated at a later date.

If executed properly, benefits of the survey process are:

- Improved communication between employees and managers.
- New relationships between employees and managers resulting from conflict resolution.

- Creation of a work environment that is conducive to high quality workmanship and productivity.

- Opportunities to improve your company in ways you have never imagined.

Conducting the Survey Process

STEP 1 Preparatory Phase

First, be certain your management team is capable of responding appropriately to the results. A checklist of "precautionary terms" which your management team must agree to prior to implementation is listed below. Do not attempt this process unless:

- Your organization's highest ranking manager understands and is in agreement with all aspects of this process.
- You are prepared to hear the truth about how employees feel about your company, your management style, and your people.
- Your highest ranking manager (and you, if you're not already the big boss) are sincerely committed to following through with this process, to the end.
- You and your management team are able to take responsibility as managers for the shortcomings and previous failures of your organization.
- You are prepared to provide truthful answers to your employees about problematic issues.
- You sincerely want to *get to the bottom* of employee morale problems, and are not afraid to *roll up your sleeves* to find and implement solutions.
- You understand that things may seem to get worse before they get better throughout the course of this process. This is especially true in organizations troubled by severe employee morale problems.

The next step is to inform the employees of the process. The announcement should be issued from the highest ranking manager, and should communicate the following concepts:

- The purpose of this survey is to create a comprehensive, numerically scored list of issues, reported in order from the most to the least pressing issue.
- While dozens of valid issues may be identified, we will only be able to process a few at a time; some may take years to address; some may never be addressed.
- No promises can prematurely be made about fixing specific problems. Confidentiality of employees is assured.

• This process is not a replacement for person-to-person communications between managers and employees.

• Each employee who chooses to participate should attend one of the information gathering meetings with a list of (5) positive things and (5) negative things about their working environment.

STEP 2

Conduct Information Gathering Meetings

Meetings are conducted according to the following guidelines:

- Ideal group size is twenty or less employees.
- No supervisors may be present.
- The facilitator is a neutral third party.
- Issues voiced during the meeting are strictly confidential.
- Each participant shares one item at a time with the group until all issues have been heard.
- Issues are recorded on flip charts.
- Flip charts are kept secured until the master list of issues can be processed.

STEP 3

Creating a Master List

After the last meeting is held, the lists of issues (flip charts) from each meeting are consolidated to form one master list which contains no more than sixty issues. To achieve this, issues listed on the flip charts are edited, while being careful not to eliminate anyone's ideas.

The master list of issues should resemble this example:

**MASTER LIST OF ISSUES
- Sample City EMS - 8/95**

15. Dispatchers show unnecessary favoritism in workload distribution.
16. Our evaluation process is too subjective.
17. We rarely get time to eat during our shifts.
18. Our new 401k retirement plan is good.
19. Our run reports take too long to complete due to duplicate entries and long narratives.
20. The supervisors are hard to reach when you need one.

STEP 4

Develop a Survey Form

Each issue from the master list is re-written to form a survey inquiry – essentially a survey question.* All inquiries are written in the form of positive lukewarm statement. For example, “dispatchers show unnecessary

EMPLOYEE SURVEY – Sample City EMS – 8/95					
IMPORTANCE RATING (10 = Most – 1 = Least)					
	Strongly Disagree (1)				
	Disagree (2)				
	Agree (3)				
	Strongly Agree (4)				
ISSUE:					
15.	Dispatchers fairly distribute the workload whenever possible.	4	3	2	1
16.	Our evaluation process is objective and fair	4	3	2	1
17.	We usually get time to eat during our shifts.	4	3	2	1
18.	The new 401K program will adequately serve my needs.	4	3	2	1
19.	Our run reports are well designed for simplicity, speed, and user friendliness.	4	3	2	1
20.	Supervisors are usually easy to access when you need them.	4	3	2	1

* Note: I recommend writing the survey on a spreadsheet program, such as Microsoft Excel or Lotus 1-2-3; it will save time and energy. With the same spreadsheet file, I have written the survey forms, entered data and calculated the results, and printed bar graph / pareto charts which illustrate the rating and importance of each issue.

favoritism in workload distribution” is converted to, “dispatchers fairly distribute the workload whenever possible.”

On the survey form, employees can indicate to what extent they agree or disagree with each inquiry. Employees will also be asked to identify and rank the


ten most important issues to them; the importance rating column on the far right side of the survey form is for this. Once complete, the survey should resemble the Employee Survey Chart shown above.

Continued on page 39

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Advertisers Index

Advertiser	Page #
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Horton Emergency Vehicles	20,21
National Ambulance Builders	2
Norman-Spencer, McKernan, Inc.	19
Oppenheimer & Co. Inc.	7
Westech Information Systems	19
Wheeled Coach Industries	40

Secrets of Successful Human Relations

Continued from page 23

occasionally. Paraphrase what they are telling you – to check your understanding. One of the greatest compliments you can pay a person is validating their worth as a person by listening to what they have to say.

10. Be trustworthy. If I know I can trust you, I feel much safer and more secure in our relationship. If I never talk about others negatively, or build myself up by tearing someone else down and I do what I say I am going to do, this promotes trust.

If you practice these ten steps, you'll have learned the secrets of successful human relations. □

Brian Scales, M.A., J.D., NREMT-P is Operations Supervisor at Mercy Medical Services in Las Vegas, Nevada. He is a Clark County senior paramedic who has served his community as a field training officer and educator. Employing his past experience and talent as a broadcaster, Brian has done the voice-over narration for many programs sponsored by the AAA.

Advances in Technology

Continued from page 31

STEP 5 The Survey Process

It is important that guidelines be followed to assure maximal validity of the results. To attain the best results:

- 100% of the employee target population should be surveyed.
- A dedicated classroom should be used for the survey process.
- An employee roster should be used to assure that every employee is given the opportunity to complete one survey form.
- A locking box with a slot should be used.
- A proctor should be present to assure that the process flows smoothly.

Instructions for completion of survey forms:

- Forms should be completed in one sitting in the proctored room.
- There is no time limit. (60 question survey should take between 20 - 60 minutes).
- Non-descript color ink should be used.
- Circle the number which correlates with how much you agree or disagree with each issue.
- As you are reading, identify each issue that is personally important to you.

earlier decision by a lower federal district court that the Sacramento fire department should not be enjoined from providing emergency ambulance services while awaiting the outcome of AMR's pending lawsuit against the City of Sacramento, which is currently scheduled to commence in the fall of 1996.

The **International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC)** has developed a resource guide entitled *Trends in the Ambulance Industry*. This is the fifth in a series addressing EMS management issues for fire service leaders. For information contact the IAFC Management Information Center at (703) 273-9815, ext. 322.

The **American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP)** has published a new guide to help medical facilities prepare and evaluate their local medical response plans. The *Community Medical Disaster Planning and Evaluation Guide* is designed to assist disaster planners, hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes, and others prepare for disasters. For more information or to order this guide, contact ACEP at (800) 798-1822 (touch 6).

The **First Responder: National Standard Curriculum** was submitted to the US-DOT NHTSA. The project was presented prior to the due date, under budget, and provided more content than was required in the original request for proposals. The members of the Curriculum Development Group (CDG) are to be commended for their efforts in this worthy educational endeavor. The group would like to thank the many outside reviewers and those individuals who were supportive of their efforts along with various organizations and publishers who kept the EMS community informed as to the status of this project as it occurred. □

Mark your calendar....

Jems Communications will present **Outlook '95**, the annual National Association of EMT (NAEMT) and the Emergency Vehicle and Fleet Management (EVFM) Conference and Exposition, on October 4-8, in Tampa, Florida. For preconference registration and additional conference information, contact Sheri Pearson at (800) 266-5367. For exhibitor information, contact Veronica Baisley at (619) 431-9797, ext. 3049. □

Send press releases to *News Around the Industry*, 3800 Auburn Boulevard, Suite C, Sacramento, CA 95821 or fax to (916) 482-5473.

- Upon completion, review the issues of personal importance and rank each beginning with the number 10 until you reach the number 1.

- Place the survey form in the locked box.

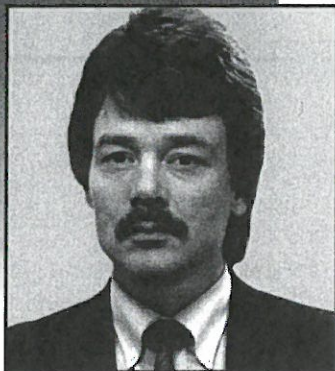
- Thank the employee for their time, and indicate when the employee can expect to see the survey results.

*Note: I recommend writing the survey on a spreadsheet program, such as Microsoft Excel or Lotus 1-2-3; it will save time and energy. With the same spreadsheet file, I have written the survey forms, entered data and calculated the results, and printed bar graph/pareto charts which illustrate the rating and importance ranks of each issue.

Author's Note: This is part one of a two part article which describes and provides guidelines for implementing a process for monitoring, measuring and managing issues which effect employee morale. Part II will cover:

- Processing the Survey Results
- Categorizing Survey Issues
- User-friendly Survey Reports (Bar Graph and Pareto Charts)
- Acting on Survey Results
- Measuring Progress
- Other Recommended Survey Tools

Wayne Ruppert is the Executive Director of Performance Improvement Research Associates, a Florida based non-profit corporation chartered to develop improved management tools for the EMS industry. He is the former National Director of Quality Improvement for LifeFleet, and has served the EMS industry full-time for seventeen years. He is an accomplished national conference speaker and writer. Wayne is employed by the Pinellas County Office of the Medical Director, St. Petersburg Junior College, and serves as a critical care transport paramedic for Hillsborough County EMS in Tampa, Florida. The author invites hearing your questions, comments and concerns. You can write to him at PO Box 607, Palm Harbor, FL 34682.



by Wayne W. Ruppert

Employee Job Satisfaction:

Getting to the Bottom Line: Part II

In my previous article (published in the July/August *AIJ*), we discussed how to create the Dynamic Work Environment Survey, in a nine-step process which is a simple way to learn about and quantify the needs and concerns of the total employee population. The first four steps provided guidelines on how to administer the survey to the employee population: 1) prepare the management team to respond to survey results; 2) conduct information gathering meetings to identify issues of concern; 3) create a master list of issues; 4) develop a survey form. This article will explain how to process the survey results, and what to do with the information.

STEP 5 Processing the Survey Results

Calculate the raw data from the survey:

- Determine the average score for each question
- Add the total number of importance points awarded for each question
- Rate the issues based on importance point totals; this provides the means for creating a quantified list of all issues which are important to your employees, listed in order from the most to the least important issue.

Once processed, the final survey report should resemble the chart shown at right.

STEP 6 Categorize Survey Results

Most issues will fall into one (or more) of the following categories:

- Issues which the employees like.
- Misperceptions.
- Valid issues which won't cost money to fix.
- Valid issues which cost money to fix, and are currently affordable.
- Valid issues which cost money to fix, but are currently not affordable.
- Valid issues which are outside our scope of control (state/local laws, contract stipulations, etc.).
- Valid issues which are simple to fix (requires no complex planning).
- Valid issues which are complicated to fix (requires research, planning, development, etc.).

For example, in our survey for Sample City EMS, the issue which rated the highest number of importance points is the statement "we usually get time to eat during our shifts," a statement which most employees either disagreed or strongly disagreed with. The average score for this issue was 1.59, which is halfway between a "2" (disagree) and a "1" (strongly disagree). Since this issue received the highest number of importance points, this tells us it's the most pressing issue to the employees of Sample City EMS. This issue falls into the following categories:

- It is an issue which will cost money to fix; it may or may not be currently affordable.
- It is a complex issue and will require some planning, since it will most likely affect the city's budget, scheduling, and dispatch process.

If Sample City's management decides to address this issue now, it should form an Employee Problem Solving Task Force, comprised of employees, dispatchers, and managers.

The remaining survey issues should be evaluated and categorized in the same fashion. The flow chart shown at right illustrates this process.

STEP 7 Develop Plan to Address Survey Issues

Most survey processes result in the *discovery* of too many issues for the management team to digest and fix at one time. Therefore, management must consider the *time and financial resources* that are available to address survey issues. How many issues can we afford to address right now? How about in three, six or twelve months from now? How much time and

money can we devote to issues that can be addressed initially? I recommend:

• Once you've ranked the issues by importance point totals, start at the top of the list and work down. By addressing the issues ranked as most important to your employees first, you'll be getting the most *bang for your buck*. Address as many issues as you can with your available time and financial resources.

• Fix as many of the simple issues which don't cost much time or money as you can. Sometimes it's the little issues which make a big difference to your workforce.

STEP 8 Acting on Survey Results

Once your management team has studied each issue and decided which ones can be addressed now, which ones will be addressed later, and which ones will not be addressed, you must communicate the survey results and your action plan to the rest of the organization. List the survey results in the order of importance point totals. This way, the issue which was rated as the number one most important to your employees is listed first; the second most important issue is listed next, and so forth. This is easily achieved if you processed the survey results with a spreadsheet program - then all you have to do is sort the survey by the *importance points total* column.

• Communicate the survey results to both the management team and the employee population. A bar graph or pareto chart is an excellent visual aid.

• Beside each issue, describe your plan of action.

• Communicate all things you can't or won't fix, and give an honest explanation as to why. Even if the explanation is "it isn't in the budget for this year," employees may not like the answer, but they will appreciate your honesty.

*For issues which are complex, form Problem Solving Task Forces comprised of employees and managers. Empower the task force to develop and implement solutions.

• Provide a time line (such as a GANTT chart) to give people an idea when they can expect to see the promised improvements.

STEP 9 Provide Progress Updates

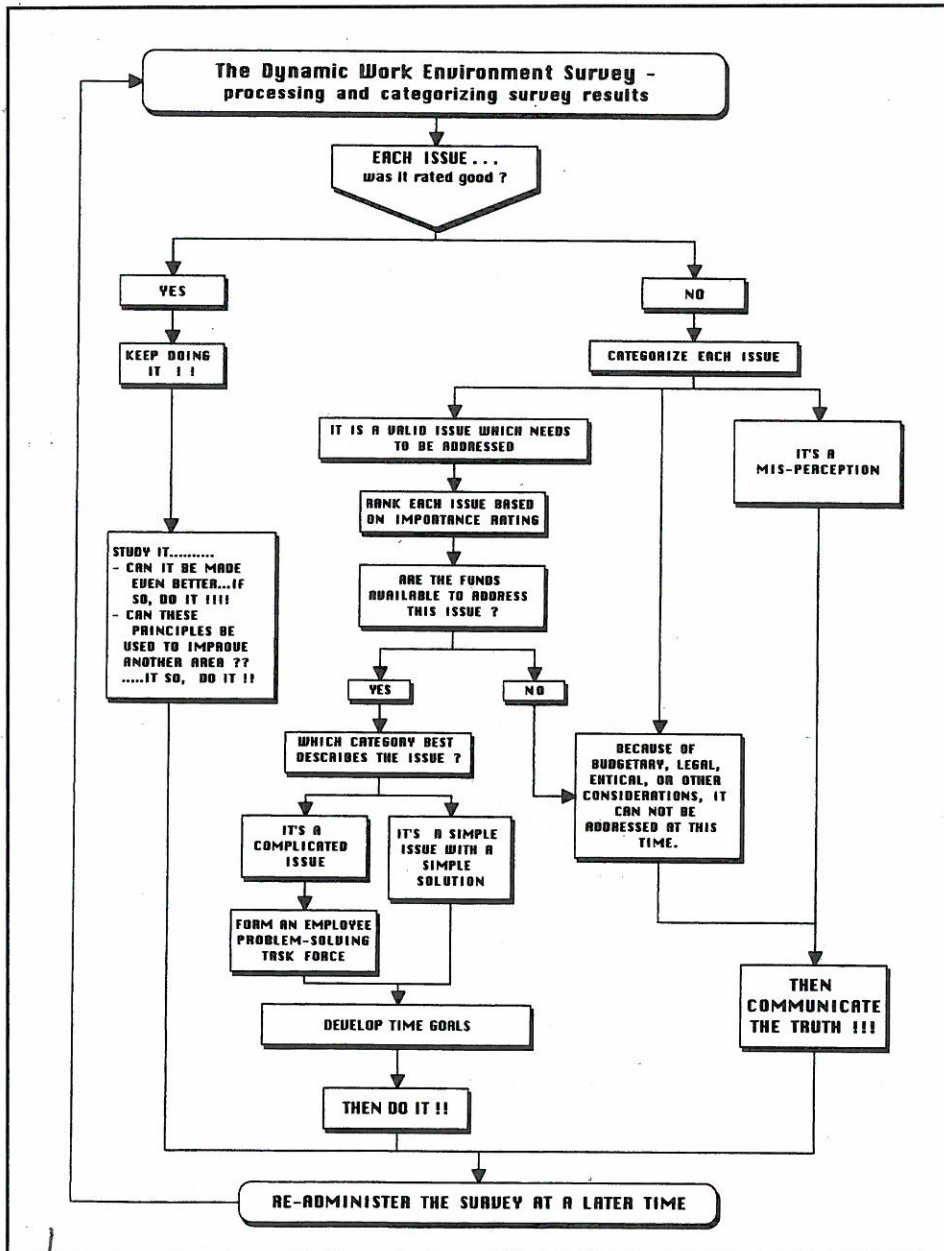
At regularly planned intervals, such as in monthly or bi-monthly newsletters, update everyone on the progress made on the issues which are currently being addressed.

*Keep the survey results posted in an obvious place. As issues are resolved, "check them off" on the master list, and provide explanations about how they were resolved. Bulletin boards, newsletters and

EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS - Sample City EMS (8/95)

*TOTAL NUMBER OF IMPORTANCE POINTS						
Average Score						
Total number of STRONGLY DISAGREE (1)						
Total number of DISAGREE (2)						
Total number of AGREE (3)						
Total number of STRONGLY AGREE (4)						
ISSUE:						
1. We usually get time to eat during our shifts	1	13	30	56	1.59	839
2. Dispatchers fairly distribute the workload whenever possible	5	16	39	40	1.86	733
3. Our evaluation process is objective and fair	8	21	35	36	2.01	520
4. Our run reports are well designed for simplicity, speed, and user-friendliness	3	20	46	31	1.95	436
5. Supervisors are usually easy to find when you need one	9	30	42	19	2.29	135
6. The new 401K program will adequately serve my needs	26	44	21	9	2.87	36

*There are several variations for calculating Importance Rating Scores. In this simulation, we simply added together all of the importance points assigned by employees for each issue, regardless of whether or not the employees agreed or disagreed with the issue. This method is by far the simplest, is reasonably accurate, but is not as precise as a more complex formula which factors in the agreement score. If you are interested, I will provide this formula to you upon written request.



memos should boldly promote your successes in resolving survey issues.

•Openly give credit to your hard-working individual employees, managers, and Problem Solving Task Forces who have given their time to develop and implement solutions to problems.

It is recommended that you re-administer the survey at a later time, such as six months or a year after the first survey. This will allow you to measure your employee's perception of progress, and to see what new issues have developed.

Other useful survey tools we will discuss in future articles include:

•**Management Feedback Evaluations** - a process where your employees provide you and each member of your management team with feedback about their strengths and weaknesses.

•**Job Satisfaction Surveys** - a tool which allows you to measure your employee's level of job satisfaction. When used in conjunction with the Dynamic Work Environment Survey featured in this article, you can measure the impact of your corrective actions to survey issues on job satisfaction.

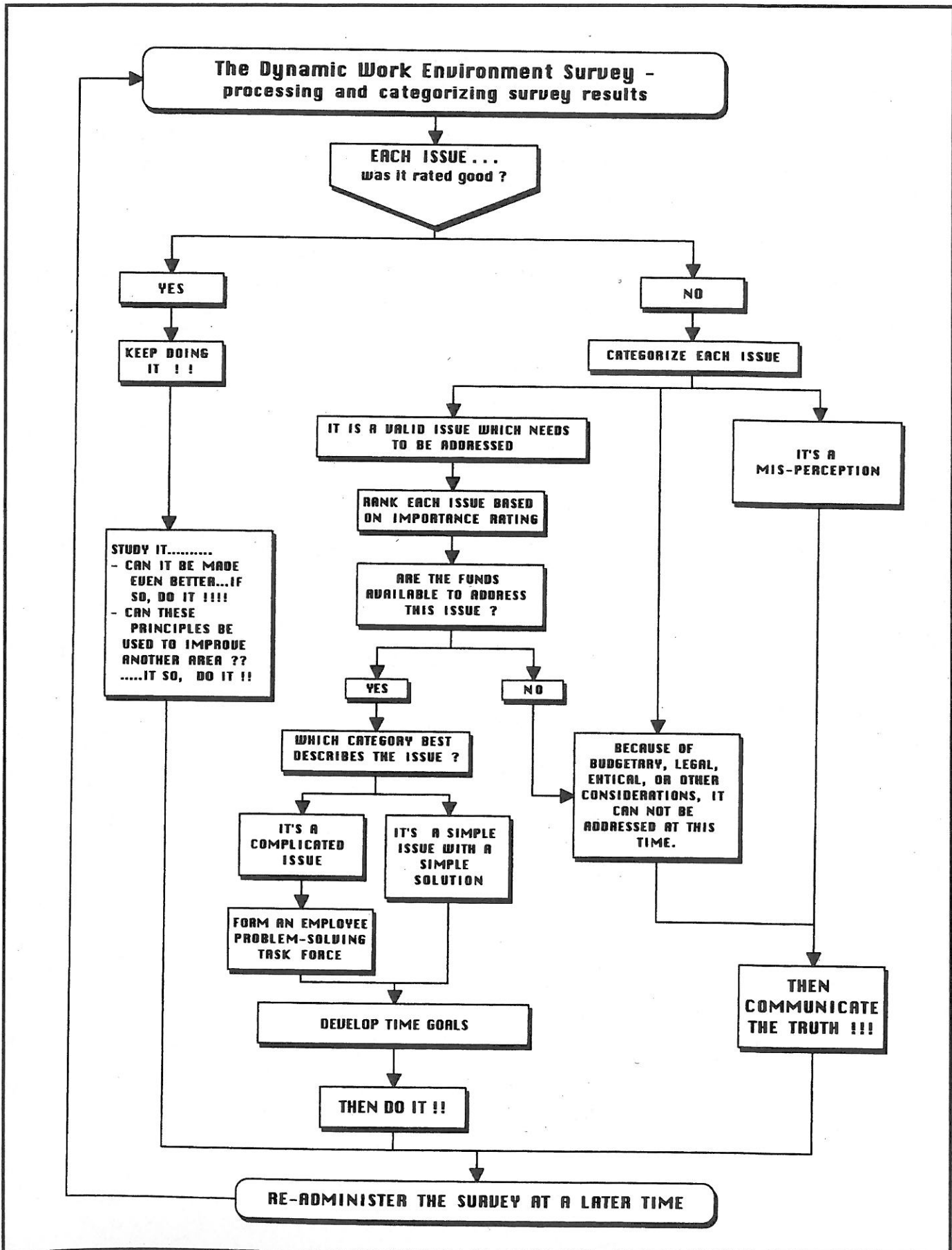
I have conducted similar focus group and survey processes for several EMS operations across the country, with the total number of survey participants in excess of 2,000. We were pleasantly surprised with the results; instead of asking for higher pay, more breaks and lighter workloads, employees' main requests were for improved communication between field and management, better management practices, employee input into the design of work processes, structures, and the work environment, and better tools to provide better patient care and customer satisfaction.

In the EMS systems who took the survey process to heart, communications and relationships between employees and managers improved. Whether you believe in the value of a survey tool such as this or not, as a manager, you are responsible for building and fostering a healthy level of employee job satisfaction within your organization. And the bottom line to employee job satisfaction is that it is an essential catalyst for developing and maintaining optimal quality, operational efficiency and productivity. □

Wayne Ruppert is the Executive Director of Performance Improvement Research Associates. He is the former National Director of Quality Improvement for LifeFleet, and has served the EMS industry full-time for seventeen years. He is an accomplished national conference speaker and writer. Wayne is employed by the Pinellas County Office of the Medical Director, St. Petersburg Junior College, and serves as a critical care transport paramedic for Hillsborough County EMS in Tampa, Florida. You can write to him at PO Box 607, Palm Harbor, FL 34682.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR ENLARGED DIAGRAM.

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