



Competencies and Guidelines for Situational Outlook Questionnaire Practitioners - Part One

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Many of us use a number of assessments in our work as change practitioners. I would like to share a practical list of activities and practitioner competencies developed from my recent experience in debriefing the Situational Outlook Questionnaire (SOQ). The SOQ is a measure available through the Creative Problem Solving Group - Buffalo (CPS-B) that examines several aspects of the work environment referred to as organizational climate.

The process of debriefing the SOQ requires a multi-faceted knowledge and skill set. These debriefing competencies are important in extracting meaningfulness and usefulness from the data and in strengthening an effective SOQ intervention. The first of this two-part series describes the specifics of understanding the clients needs, distributing and analyzing the measure, and preparing for the feedback session. Part two of the series considers the face-to-face session including delivery of the information, summarizing the result, and extending the experience into future-oriented next steps.

During this first stage, the SOQ practitioner prepares him/her self and the client for engaging in the SOQ intervention event. Listed below are six major activities, the time required to perform each, and the knowledge and skill set required of the practitioner.

Activity 1 The SOQ practitioner conducts a Task Appraisal with the client. The time required for this activity is approximately 2 hours.

Intent:

1. To gain clarity of the need and intent of the SOQ intervention.
2. To guide process planning and to establish the focus for developing debrief questions.
3. To clarify the roles of the client, participants and SOQ practitioner.
4. To set the stage for a safe environment where the client can receive, accept, reflect and develop the SOQ results.

A series of questions guide this discussion. The structured conversation involves delivering the prepared questions, listening, observing, evaluating, probing and recording responses. From this structured discussion, the kind and degree of ownership, ambiguity, complexity, novelty, time, history, vision and task importance can be determined. Some sample questions appear below.

Personal Orientation - understanding the key people involved.

Who are the participants? What are their jobs? What do you hope to gain from this task? What can they hope to gain?

Situational Outlook - understanding the context in which change will take place. What are the key challenges facing your workplace today? Do you think people are happy working here? Is there a certain time frame within which you need this information?

Desired Outcomes - understanding the task.

Why do you think an intervention is necessary? What do you hope to learn that you don't know now? What have you already thought of or tried? What are some of the historical challenges? What are some of the plans for the future? What are the goals of this intervention?

Methodology - understanding the appropriateness of using and debriefing the SOQ.

Describe the SOQ intervention as one solution. Explain the ethics, confidentiality, qualifications, standards, research and storage policies of CPS-B and yourself as an SOQ practitioner. What obstacles do you see in using the SOQ? Do you want to hold an individual or group feedback session?

Knowledge and Skills required of the SOQ Practitioner

- Specific knowledge of the purpose and components of Task Appraisal.
- Specific knowledge of the roles of the client, the SOQ practitioner and the participants.
- Specific knowledge of the SOQ, what it measures, its uses and limitations.
- A clear understanding of the ethics, confidentiality, qualifications, standards, research and storage policies of CPS-B and yourself as a SOQ practitioner.
- Skill at using open and closed questions and a good understanding of the role they play in eliciting information?
- Skill at spontaneously interjecting probing questions to elicit richness and depth of information.
- The ability to defer judgment, listen to understand and build, and to use collaborative language. In fact, to practice the skills, behaviors and attitudes that successfully establish a climate for change and innovation throughout the debrief itself.

Activity 2 The client and the SOQ practitioner make a decision whether or not to conduct the SOQ intervention. If so, they gain agreement on the scope, timeline and the cost. The time required for this activity is approximately 2 hours.

Output:

1. Explicit goal(s) and objective(s) of the SOQ intervention including learning objectives.
2. The defined area of focus and a complete list of participants and addresses.
3. The method of feedback - individual, group or both.
4. To provide as much client preview as possible on what to expect from the data results. Sample reports and data displays are useful.
5. Set specific dates for next steps.

Knowledge and Skills required of the SOQ Practitioner

- Knowledge of other measures, instruments, processes, tools and techniques and how they might be used in conjunction with the SOQ.
- Knowledge of the processing time and cost structure of CPS-B.
- Skill at writing clear and measurable performance objectives.
- Skill on all levels of Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive learning. Specifically the ability to break down the components of the task appraisal and to synthesize them into a new whole incorporating the SOQ measure, then making an evaluation that would lead to the use or rejection of the SOQ as an intervention.
- Skill in the development of the affective domain learning and its application to a debrief of the SOQ.

Activity 3 Order the SOQ forms from CPS-B gaining agreement on the timeline, methods of data display and cost. It is important that the SOQ data is displayed in such a way as to respond to the needs of the client while honoring the confidentiality of the participants. The time required for this activity is approximately 1 hour.

When selecting the methods of data display consider the goals and objectives of the SOQ intervention. CPS-B has several display formats for both quantitative and qualitative data. Select quantitative comparator data that is relevant to the client and the participants. Choose a manageable volume considering the time and complexity of the situation.

Knowledge and Skills required of the SOQ Practitioner

- Specific knowledge of the SOQ data display vehicles and comparator data available through CPS-B.

Activity 4 The SOQ practitioner along with the client prepares a cover letter to participants. The time required for this activity is approximately 2 hours.

Cover letters need to consider the purpose of the SOQ intervention; provide a description of what the SOQ is assessing; discuss the specific area of focus, for example, a work unit, a physical location, a team, a division etc.; define the roles of the participant, client and SOQ practitioner; include a request for honest, well-considered input with a guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality; explain the method of results feedback; announce the questionnaire completion deadline and provide a thank you for their time, effort and view.

Knowledge and Skills required of the SOQ Practitioner

- The ability to craft a letter that is clear, confident and persuasive.

Activity 5 The SOQ practitioner analyzes the data results. The time required for this activity is approximately 2 hours.

Has any sensitive data appeared? Is further investigation necessary? Is the volume appropriate? Are some data displays more/less useful than others? In what ways have the results tied into the established goals and objectives of the intervention? What are the strengths and the areas of concern that emerge from the results? What are some potential actions or recommendations?

Knowledge and Skills required of the SOQ Practitioner

- The ability to hold the total picture at multiple levels. To see the SOQ detailed results within the context of the organization and within the context of SOQ theory and research.
- The ability to be objective and open to multiple options and points of view.

Activity 6 The SOQ practitioner plans the debrief process/agenda. The time required for this activity is approximately 4 hours.

The feedback meeting with the client should be planned for about 2 hours. The process plan has four major components as listed below.

- 1) Agenda. There is no right or wrong way to order the activities of an SOQ debrief. The following represents one way going from broad to narrow:
 - a) Establish the physical and psychological climate.
 - b) Gain agreement to agenda and time frames.

- c) Overview of the SOQ history, psychometric time.
- d) Prepare the data display materials.
- e) Qualitative results. Allot 30 minutes of meeting time.
- f) Prepare data display materials.
- g) Quantitative results. Allot 30 minutes of meeting time.
- h) Recommendations. Allot 10 minutes of meeting time. Prepare some potential actions or recommendations that might be helpful to the client.
- i) Summary. Allot 10 minutes of meeting time. Allow time for the client to assimilate the data and to draw linkages to the goals and objectives of the session.
- j) Extending. Allot 40 minutes of meeting time. This section is where the client begins to develop the learnings, generalize and transform the learnings into actionable plans.

2) Handout package. In the package of handouts for the client, you may want to include a customized "Assessing the Climate for Innovation" document, the SOQ Feedback report from CPS-B, a copy of the cover letter and the participant list. The SOQ practitioner will want a duplicate copy with side notes and highlights to help guide the discussion. Package in 3-ring binder or portfolio. There is a risk that the data will become disorganized during the session.

3) Establishing Physical and Psychological Safety. The best way to understand climate for innovation is to experience it. One role of the SOQ practitioner is to create such a climate throughout the feedback meeting. Be open, honest and trusting through words, actions, body language and tone. Every effort must be made to assist the client in being objective, maintaining self esteem and staying open to learning opportunities. Avoid formal boardrooms. Find a location that is quiet, private, casual and comfortable. Select an appropriate time of day. Agreed-to video taping of the session allows the client to review at his/her leisure.

4) Processing preparation. To gain full engagement of the client, as much of the learning as possible should be by *doing* rather than *telling*. Go through each step of the agenda and devise a way to avoid telling. Pre-read the materials and results and highlight the key topics on the SOQ practitioners' copy of the materials. This helps guide the discussion and ensure that major points are covered. Have a list of probing questions prepared ahead of time to help stimulate thinking.

Knowledge and Skills required of the SOQ Practitioner

- Knowledge of experiential learning process and techniques.
- The ability to visualize the flow and anticipate potential hazards.

In Closing

You will have spent upwards of thirteen hours preparing for a quality SOQ feedback event. The above demonstrates the complex and multi-faceted knowledge and skill set required of the SOQ practitioner. The implications of these data lead to the understanding that an SOQ practitioner requires a significant level of competency in the areas of task appraisal, experiential learning (process and techniques), SOQ theory and measure, interpersonal skills of listening, questioning, probing, closing; other compatible measures, instruments, processes, tools and techniques; writing performance objectives; processing on all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of cognitive learning; advanced levels of metacognition.

Further expansion on the activities, knowledge and skills are available through CPS-B. Part two of the series considers the face-to-face session including delivery of the information, summarizing the result, and extending the experience into future-oriented next steps.