**Critique of the SELC Sample Self Assessment Questionnaire**

**Link to questionnaire**
Sample Self Assessment Questionnaire, Sustainable Economies Law Center (SELC):
https://docs.google.com/a/theselc.org/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScepITkd8cxs6GofLa1dSWhq_0Cp0-uwYUrRr7QPi75dk6g7w/viewform

**Introduction and purpose**

The SELC Sample Self Assessment Questionnaire is designed to support a biannual performance review process within a democratic workplace. It aims to structure reflection around four domains, personal efficiency and effectiveness, personal wellbeing, workplace culture and collaboration, and learning and development. The items broadly map onto these constructs, which is consistent with the principle that questionnaires should clearly operationalise the concepts the organisation wishes to measure (Dillman et al, 2014, Tourangeau et al, 2000).

**2. Key strengths**

First, the questionnaire is well aligned with its developmental goals. Many open questions invite staff to describe accomplishments, challenges and future learning needs in their own words. This supports richer, context specific feedback rather than reducing performance to a single score, which is appropriate in a participatory organisational context.

Second, the survey integrates clearly into a wider review process that includes peer assessment and a facilitated conversation. Linking a questionnaire to concrete follow up actions is consistent with good practice in employee survey design, which emphasises that data collection should feed into visible change and development rather than exist in isolation (Dillman et al, 2014, People Element, 2023).

Third, the instrument makes explicit reference to wellbeing and workload, rather than focusing only on performance and compliance. This acknowledges that sustainable effectiveness depends on both outcomes and the personal cost of delivering them, which is a strength from an organisational development perspective.

## 3. Introduction and cognitive load

The introductory text is very detailed and explains the full three part performance review process, self assessment, peer assessment and the review conversation. While this shows transparency, survey methodology work indicates that overly long introductions can increase cognitive burden and shape how later questions are interpreted (Tourangeau et al, 2000).

For example, repeated references to "constructive feedback" and "areas for improvement" may prime respondents to focus on weaknesses, and the mix of instructions for several forms risks confusion about the specific purpose of this questionnaire. A shorter, focused introduction that explains only,

- the purpose of this self assessment,

- who will see the responses, and

- how the information will be used,

would be more consistent with guidance that introductions should be concise and directly relevant to the survey task (Dillman et al, 2014).


## 4. Question format and respondent burden

The questionnaire relies heavily on open ended items, particularly in the sections on accomplishments, areas for improvement, sources of stress and desired development. Open questions can yield rich qualitative data but they are also cognitively demanding. Research on survey design shows that long sequences of demanding items increase fatigue and encourage "satisficing", where respondents give very brief or superficial answers in order to complete the survey more quickly (Dillman et al, 2014).

In this case, multiple open questions appear consecutively, for example, "What are some of your personal accomplishments", "What areas of your personal effectiveness would you most like to improve on", and later several more about areas of stress and future skills. A more balanced design would alternate concise rating scale questions with a smaller number of targeted open questions in each section, maintaining the reflective character while reducing burden.


## 5. Rating scales, direction and labelling

The questionnaire uses a number of five point rating scales, for example for efficiency, compliance, creativity, focus, fulfilment, collaboration and meeting behaviour. Using five category scales is consistent with recommendations that attitude questions should

typically offer between five and seven response categories to capture enough variation without overwhelming respondents (Menold and Bogner, 2016).

However, the **direction and labelling of scales are not consistent** across items. In most questions, higher scores correspond to more positive states (for example, 1 Poor, 5 Excellent), but in the question "How often do you feel stressed and overwhelmed by your work", 1 corresponds to "Always" and 5 to "Never or almost never". Respondents move back and forth between "high is good" and "high is bad", which increases the risk of error. Work on rating scale design shows that changes in polarity and inconsistent labelling can confuse respondents and affect measurement quality (Menold and Bogner, 2016, Menold, 2018).

To align with this literature, all scales should follow a single polarity, for example 1 always representing "lower / worse" and 5 "higher / better", with clear verbal labels at least at the endpoints. The stress item could either be recoded so that 1 is "Never or almost never" and 5 is "Always", or reframed more positively (for example, "How often do you feel calm and in control in your work") to keep directionality consistent.

## 6. Double barrelled items and wording

Several items in the questionnaire combine more than one construct. For instance, "Punctuality and participation in staff meetings" asks simultaneously about arriving on time and actively participating, and "How often do you feel stressed and overwhelmed by your work" combines stress and being overwhelmed. Double barrelled questions are specifically identified in the survey literature as problematic because respondents may think of one aspect but not the other or average across them, which reduces measurement quality (Menold, 2018).

Good practice is to separate such questions into two items, one about punctuality and one about participation, or one about stress and one about feeling overwhelmed. This creates clearer constructs and more interpretable data.

In addition, some labels use very informal or emotionally loaded language, for example "I totally got it under control" at the positive end of the workload scale. Questionnaire guidelines recommend neutral, precise wording rather than colloquial phrases, in order to minimise ambiguity and avoid influencing how respondents feel they should answer (Dillman et al, 2014).

## 7. Anonymity, confidentiality and candour

The form requires respondents to enter their name and notes that self and peer assessment forms are stored in a folder accessible to all staff. At the same time, it asks about sensitive topics, such as feeling stressed, overwhelmed, unsupported or burdened by aspects of the work. Evidence from employee survey practice indicates that perceived anonymity and clear limits on who can see identifiable responses are important for eliciting honest feedback, particularly on sensitive issues (Dillman et al, 2014, People Element, 2023).

The current approach may discourage full candour. Improvements could include:

- restricting access to identifiable responses to a smaller group (for example HR and immediate circle members), or

- providing a clear explanation that the data will be used for developmental rather than disciplinary purposes and exactly which roles will be able to see named responses.

Such clarification would bring the questionnaire more in line with recommended ethical practice.

## 8. Conclusion

In summary, the SELC Sample Self Assessment Questionnaire has several strengths. It is conceptually well aligned with its developmental purpose, it foregrounds both effectiveness and wellbeing, and it invites rich narrative responses that fit a democratic, participatory workplace culture. At the same time, survey design literature suggests concrete improvements, shortening and focusing the introduction, reducing respondent burden by balancing open and closed items, standardising the direction and labelling of rating scales, splitting double barrelled questions, and clarifying how identifiable data are stored and used. Implementing these changes would preserve the reflective spirit of the instrument while improving its reliability, clarity and ethical robustness.

# References

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