

case study



The Springboard Project

Exploratory Research

Background

The Springboard Project is an independent, action-oriented commission launched by Business Roundtable, an association of CEOs of leading U.S. companies. Their charge is to make policy recommendations to equip Americans with the knowledge and skills needed for lifelong success in the U.S. workforce. In order to formulate and test their recommendations, the commission needed to gain a deeper understanding of US workers' needs, difficulties and perceptions regarding the current job market.

The members of The Springboard Project commissioned Benenson Strategy Group (BSG), a strategic research and consulting firm, to conduct research to better understand both blue and white collar workers' attitudes and behaviors toward job skills and training. While the focus groups BSG conducted provided great insight, they felt that the blue-collar workers might not have been as forthcoming on the topic of training due to the group setting.

Why iModerate?

To ensure they left no stone unturned, BSG engaged iModerate to conduct online, one-on-one conversations with this group. BSG had used iModerate's conversations in the past to garner candid feedback. They knew that the anonymity and one-on-one environment associated with this method was ideal for getting respondents to open up even when discussing the most sensitive subjects. If this audience was in fact more guarded and reticent due to the group/in-person dynamic, BSG was confident that iModerate would bring their true thoughts and ideas to the forefront.

Our Objectives

- Gain a better understanding of how these workers view their current situation, what skills they need, how they should be acquired and where the future of blue-collared labor will go
- Review a proposed work/skills program

In addition, the moderators sought to understand how the economic situation played a role, obtained insight into what workers feel makes them successful and uncovered their ideas about ways to train the workforce.

Our Approach

iModerate conducted 30 online, one-on-one conversations. The respondent pool was comprised of nationally representative, male, blue-collar workers between the ages of 18-55.

These respondents were all currently employed, but concerned about job loss. They were split into three groups which focused on the economy, their current job and training. All groups were shown a list of features for a proposed work/skills program using iModerate's interactive whiteboard.

What We Discovered

iModerate provided additional insight surrounding the attitudes and opinions of blue-collar workers. In conjunction with the focus groups, the one-on-ones uncovered this groups' feelings and ideas on numerous subjects including: the value of skills that pay off in the short term versus the future, practical obstacles to training, emotional obstacles to training, the credibility of different programs and the organizations that offer them, and the "must-haves" for job training.

Where the conversations proved most valuable was in eliciting insight that proved there was a fundamental difference in how blue-collar workers spoke about training in front of their peers as opposed to how they discussed it privately. This disparity not only confirmed BSG's hypothesis, but gave them a major piece of insight - blue-collar men are outwardly resistant to training, but when speaking privately, they admit the need. Specifically, the focus groups found that this audience is opposed to skills training and act somewhat defensive when the subject comes up. However, workers that went through the one-on-ones admitted that they are in fact interested in the benefits of skills training and want to become more valuable workers. The quotes below from the conversations illustrate this:

Guest: If a program was available to me in my line of work, I would do it as soon as possible.

Guest: By expanding my skills in my job, I feel that makes me less replaceable than someone with more limited skills.

Guest: I could get training that would hopefully make me a more valuable employee.

Why it Mattered for The Springboard Project

In the end, iModerate allowed BSG to garner candid commentary from blue collar workers. Just as important as the new insights captured in the one-on-ones was the periphery finding that training for this group was in fact a delicate subject. The intimacy afforded by the iModerate sessions served to augment the research and gave The Springboard Project a unique purview into blue-collar workers' perception of training.