

Point of ORIGIN Special Edition

Second Company Survey Yields Surprising Results

It was with extreme anxiousness that many of us at Origin awaited the compiled results of our second company-wide opinion survey. We were very pleased, and a little surprised, with the results.

We would like to express our appreciation to Al Nelson for his contributions in coordinating and compiling the questions included in the questionnaire, and to Mary Margaret Ipser and Steve Morris for their contributions in coordinating, compiling and reporting the results. Also thanks to the many others that offered valued advice on the contents of the questionnaire, and to those that helped us enter and collate all the data.

As we said, this 1992 survey represented our second such survey. The first survey was conducted by Origin's president, Robert Garriott, in February 1988. That first survey had a total of thirty-five respondents comprised of the publishing group in New Hampshire and the product development group in Austin.

The 1992 survey had over 125 total respondents. Information was gathered in 4 major categories consisting of over 100 questions. Each question was rated from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) with a few yes/no questions in addition. In general, scores of 4.0 and higher are extremely good ratings; 3.4 to 3.9 are positive ratings; 3.0 to 3.3 are neutral and below 3.0 are negative.

Overall Impressions

First, let's take a look at how employees feel, in general, about what it is like to work at ORIGIN.

- 3.9 How satisfied are you with your job at Origin?
- 3.7 How likely are you to make working at Origin a long term career?
- 4.1 How much fun do you have at your job?
- 4.2 How much loyalty do you feel towards Origin?
- 1.9 Do you watch the clock? (1=yes, 2=no)
- 2.4 Do you think of looking for another job? (2=rarely, 3=sometimes)

There are extremely few employed people around the country that can truly say they have fun at their job! At Origin, the average "fun factor" was a resounding high of 4.1 and "job satisfaction" came in at 3.9!

How many of you have ever had a job where you were so bored all of the time that you found yourself watching the clock in anticipation of your lunch break or quitting time? Not many "clock watchers" at Origin! 90% of employees answered an emphatic "NO" when asked "Do you watch the clock?"

Origin employees answered that they would like to make working at Origin a long-term career (3.7) and that they rarely-to-sometimes think of looking for another job (2.4). No company could ever expect a greater sense of loyalty than Originites expressed (4.2)!

- 3.3 What is the average level of job satisfaction among employees?
- 3.2 How good is overall morale among employees?
- 3.6 How good is the moral in your department or work group?

It is very interesting to note that although, on the average, everyone expressed very positive feelings about working at Origin, most people believe that their co-workers are less content than they are. Personal job satisfaction came in at 3.9 whereas impressions of their co-workers job satisfaction and overall morale came in at the neutral ratings of 3.3 and 3.2, respectively. Yet, the closer people worked together, the more positively they rated each other's morale (3.6). A definite indication that perceptions can be deceiving.

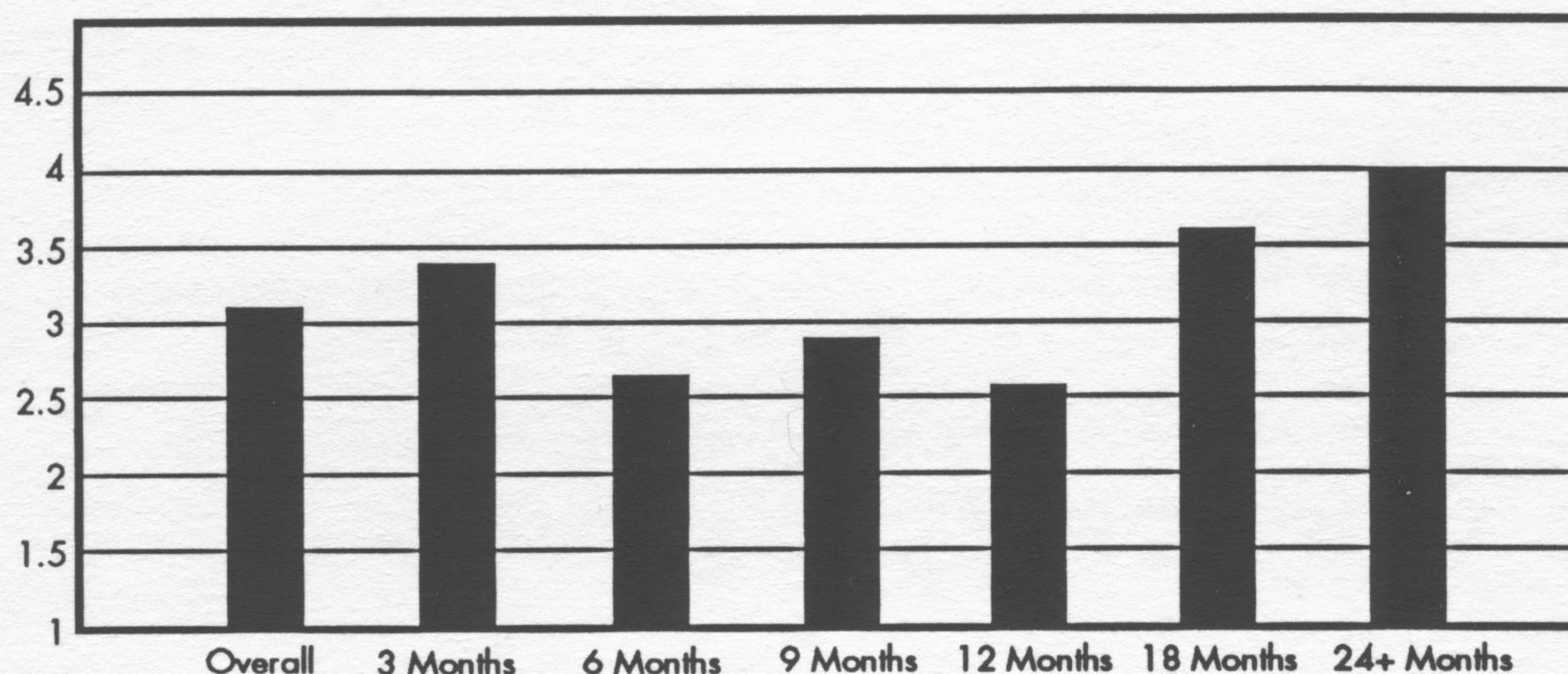
- 3.6 How highly do you feel the company values talent/skill?
- 3.6 How highly do you feel the company values sheer effort?
- 3.2 How highly do you feel the company values experience?
- 3.1 How loyal do you feel Origin is to you?

Employees rated the company positively when it came to their belief that Origin values talented and skilled employees who work hard (3.6). They also believe Origin is fairly neutral in the value placed on experience (3.2) and in the company's sense of loyalty towards employees (3.1).

The chart on the following page shows the breakdown of employee belief of the company's loyalty towards its employees based upon length of employment. It would seem to make sense that those employees that are most optimistic about Origin's feelings towards them would be the new employees that are still in the "honeymoon" phase, along with those employees that have already been with Origin a long time.

We didn't want to inundate you with information, so the regular Point of ORIGIN edition will be distributed at Monday's ULTIMA VII ship party.

How loyal do you feel Origin is to you?



Quality and Image

- 4.5 Rate the overall quality of the products (games) produced at Origin.
 3.9 Rate the quality of ancillary products (clue books for instance) we make.
 4.2 How good, in your opinion, is Origin's public image?

There is no shortage of pride among Origin employees for the quality of the products that everyone works so hard and so enthusiastically to create! Opinion of overall product quality almost shot off the scale at an amazing 4.5! Quality of ancillary products followed closely at 3.9. At a high of 4.2, everyone indicated another source of pride in their ratings of Origin's public image.

Growth and Success

- 4.1 How would you rate the company's potential for growth next year?
 4.3 How successful do you see the company in the long run?

It was clearly indicated that everyone believes Origin's high-quality products is firmly establishing Origin on the road to success. General opinion held Origin at a high of 4.1 for its potential growth next year and an even higher 4.3 for its long-term success.

Compensation

- 2.9 Grade your rate of pay relative to the hours required to do your job.
 2.8 Grade your rate of pay relative to the local job market.
 2.6 Grade your rate of pay relative to similar jobs at other game companies.
 2.9 How does your rate of pay at Origin compare to your last job?

Pay has always been, and always shall be, a point of contention among employees of every industry (and ours certainly is no exception). Origin's 1988 survey revealed that pay was the main area of discontent. It was encouraging to note however, that in the 1992 survey Origin employees rated their pay (2.8) at almost 10% higher than the National Norm of U.S. Companies (2.6). Origin employees felt they were inadequately paid for the time they put in (2.9) and were underpaid relative to the local job market (2.8). Origin was rated lower still when compared to other game companies (2.6), but there was a slight improvement when rate of pay was compared to employee's previous job (2.9).

Software, Hardware, Support

- 3.8 How useful is the software you use to do your job?
 4.0 Rate the usefulness of the hardware (computer) you use to do your job.
 2.9 Rate the availability of support materials like reference books.
 3.8 Rate the availability of expendable supplies like paper, pens and diskettes.
 3.8 Rate the availability of support services like LAN and tech support.

Origin employees highly rated the company's efforts to provide them with everything they need to do their job. Software tools were rated at a high of 3.8 and hardware tools were rated even higher at 4.0. Normal office supply availability came in at a high of 3.8, as did technical support services. The only area that was rated negatively was the availability of reference materials (2.9). Active steps have already been taken to remedy this situation through the consolidation and additional procurement of all types of reference material to be housed

in a single library location. This also will include on-line CD-ROM databases of widely used publications. Mary Margaret Ipser has been spearheading this operation, so if any of you have company owned books or materials that you think should be housed, indexed, and cross-referenced in our library, then please deposit them with her.

Training and Advancement

- 2.4 Rate the adequacy of training and orientation provided to new employees.
 3.4 Do you have a path for advancement at Origin?
 4.0 Does working at Origin improve your future employment opportunities?

Everyone clearly expressed that employees, particularly newer employees, should receive more training (2.4). Respondents rated internal growth opportunities positively at 3.4, yet were very enthusiastic when asked if their experience at Origin improved their future employment opportunities (4.0).

Based on the employee feedback, active steps have been taken to create and implement training programs for all levels of employees. Mary Margaret Ipser, under the direction of Sharon Miller (the Development Operations Manager), has been researching training curriculums that cover a wide assortment of skills and experience levels, for both onsite and offsite classes.

Not content with only a slightly positive rating on internal advancement concerns, we are defining and documenting all current job definitions, job requirements, and structures within those jobs, and what paths of opportunity exist for anyone at Origin, regardless of what their current job is.

Communication

- 2.5 How good is company-wide communication and information flow?
 3.3 Rate your understanding of the organizational structure.
 3.0 Rate your familiarity with the company's overall goals.
 2.7 How clear are Origin's company policies?
 2.1 How well documented are policies?
 2.8 Rate the implementation of policies?
 3.5 How much do you agree with the direction the company is moving in?

Employees sent a clear signal that they want and need better internal communications. The same message came through in the 1988 survey when "communications" was ranked the #2 area respondents disliked most.

In the 1992 survey, company communication and information flow was rated a low 2.5. Determining solutions to this is a particularly perplexing problem. Many approaches to "improved communication" have been attempted through such means as starting up Point Of Origin, the Origin network BBS', Happy Hour announcements, and Department Head meetings. Improving communications will continue to be an ongoing goal at Origin that we will all strive towards achieving.

Understanding Origin's company policies was rated negatively at 2.7 and documentation of those policies came in even lower at 2.1 (must have something to do with Origin's having trudged along all these years without an employee handbook). Opinions improved somewhat when asked to rate Origin's implementation of company policies (2.8).

It seems the recent introduction of the "matrix" management structure in Product Development didn't completely confuse everyone. Understanding of Origin's organizational structure was rated in the upper neutral range at 3.3.

Employees rated their familiarity with Origin's overall goals at a flat 3.0, but those who have an understanding of Origin's goals voiced their agreement with the company direction (3.5).

Management

3.2 How high is your confidence in Origin's management system?

- Does your supervisor understand your job?
yes:84%
- Do upper managers understand your job?
yes:56%

The chart below shows the overall rating for perceived management and leadership in each department:

LEADERSHIP/MANAGEMENT	
4.3	Sales
4.1	Customer Service
4.0	Operations
3.9	Art
3.9	Marketing
3.9	Writing
3.8	Publishing
3.7	Administration
3.6	PD
3.5	QA
3.5	TDA
3.4	Sound
3.3	Upper Management
3.2	Programming

Major Issues

1992 Survey Compared to National Norm of U.S. Companies

CATEGORY	ORIGIN	NORM
Job Satisfaction/Enjoyment	4.0	NA
Job Security	3.1	3.1
Management Leadership	3.2	2.9
Professional Growth & Devel.	3.7	2.8
Pay	2.8	2.6
Quality	4.5	3.6

Some Highlights from the ORIGIN 1988 Survey

How are things going in general?

Pretty good to great	54%
OK	34%
Much room for improvement	11%

What are three things you like about Origin?

- #1 People
- #2 Environment
- #3 Job Itself

What are the three things you dislike most about Origin?

- #1 Pay
- #2 Poor Communications
- #3 Management

The 1988 Origin survey rated "Management" as the #3 problem area. Respondents to the 1992 survey were fairly neutral in their general confidence of Origin's management system (3.2). However, when broken down by department, 12 of the 14 departments received positive to very high ratings on Leadership\Management. It was understandable that the programming department would receive the lowest rating (although still neutral) due to our having operated without a manager in that area. The recent promotion of Thomas Blom to that position should go a long way in pulling that rating back up into the positive.

84% of the respondents believed that their supervisor understands their job, but only 56% believed that upper management shares that same understanding. Upper management rated a neutral 3.3 on Leadership/Management (22% higher than the National Norm of U.S. Companies), a positive 3.5 on Quality of Work, a high 3.9 on Professionalism, an even higher 4.0 on Dedication.

Present Building/New Building

3.7 How comfortable/adequate is the building you work in?

- Do you want to move to another building?
yes:58%
- Do you want to move to the new building under consideration? yes:50%

It is safe to say that respondents were pretty evenly divided on the issue of moving to a new building. 58% wanted to move, but only 50% wanted to move to the building under consideration on Hwy 183. It seems that everyone is very comfortable with where they are right now (3.7). What more can be done on this issue is questionable. The Hwy. 183 building is about the last available Austin property that seems to meet most (although certainly not all) of Origin's criteria. Remaining at 110 Wild Basin is remotely possible, but not very likely due to many complications with long-term requirements that the current building owners have proposed imposing upon us. We're somewhat between a rock and a hard spot.

Employees Speak Their Minds...

There is no shortage of strong-willed people at ORIGIN, willing to express their views on relevant issues. The following are excerpts from comments returned with the survey:

"Over the last few months projects have appeared, false starts made, and vanished. Who decides what projects get worked on...? I assume only upper management has the power to create, destroy or change projects. This project fumbling is what lowered management's ratings." (Art)

"Although I know the company likes the C/S Reps, I don't believe there is much recognition or respect for them. I would like to see everyone in PD have to spend a week in C/S to get a better idea of what goes on in there, and perhaps the attitude would change." (Customer Service)

"I am disappointed that this position is rated as an entry level position when it is obviously not... With the release of Wing Commander II, the technical level of this job skyrocketed. With no training from the company, it was up to each of us to learn as much as possible on our own to share with each other... I do not wish to sound ungrateful, but I am enrolled in college, and it is hard to go to school, work so many hours and still live below the poverty line." (Customer Service)

"Let's see this company run as a company, and not as a Summer Camp, where the "attendees" sleep in the bunk rooms, and come to work whenever they please. I think that everyone deserves to take a "break," and there may be times necessary for people to spend the night here, but there is no reason for so many people to come in so late so often." (Customer Service)

"A vibrant company is good, but things change so rapidly here from day to day that the answers to several of the questions have fluctuated significantly just over the past few days. I'm not convinced that much change is good... Origin management reminds me of Jekyll and Hyde. Sometimes it will do very thoughtful, very considerate things, and sometimes it can act like it has no comprehension of the phrase "employee relations." (Marketing)

"The wrong people are deciding what games get done and who gets to do them. How can someone who has no more understanding of computer games than the person on the street make intelligent decisions in these areas? With the group of people we have at Origin, we could be totally dominating the market; it is ripe for the taking." (Programming)

"The 2 overall problems seem, to me, to be: 1) Overall "cheapness" of the company. Low salaries, no more "perks," limited donuts, high management salaries. Money at Origin is made by people in the "trenches," in spite of meddling and foolishness by upper management. 2) Upper Management. Simple. Hire people who have a clue about what they are doing. "Systems" and "formula" aren't management, they are a cop out. All management planned and run products have bombed. Doing this type of product by committee only creates games that no one feels strong enough about to kill, i.e. BLAND." (Programming)

"Not all departments are managed well with respect to one another - for example, people in PD can "get away" with more than an employee in Customer Service. It is not fair to treat employees differently based on where they work. Besides, it generates a great deal of TENSION! ... Management is still learning good skills, that's fine - but we should stop reinventing techniques of management. Let's find out how to do things right the first time, instead of trial and error." (Programming)

"I feel that the company's greatest strength is the dedication of all its employees. From the President down I feel that everyone is strongly dedicated to the company and the quality of their work. I feel that is what makes Origin the best game company in the business." (Writing)

"I think that TDAs are way underrated. They are essential to the game building process and don't get the recognition deserved." (Writing)

"I feel that management's biggest shortcoming with employees is communication. With everything moving so quickly, explaining the company's intended direction, goals and decisions must be very difficult, but many people feel as though they are kept in the dark." (Writing)

"There is general acceptance among almost all of the employees I know of the notion that Origin's upper management is both: 1) out of touch with the needs and desires of the employees; and 2) Cheap." (TDA)

"I believe upper management has no understanding or respect for what we do, and will continue to let us carry a heavy load at low pay. When I took this job I knew I would be working for peanuts.. My hope was that once I proved how valuable of an employee I was, I would be recognized and compensated accordingly. Now I believe this will not happen. Please prove me wrong. Also, how about buying more than one dinky donut per employee on Mondays? We're worth at least two..." (TDA)

"Basically, I don't have any problems with the way Origin operates. Like anybody, I'd like to make more money, but who wouldn't? I also think we have entirely too many people who do nothing but piss and moan. Hopefully, they'll find work elsewhere. Cool company, cool games, cool job." (TDA)

"I have seen and experienced several employers who claim a "team" attitude and interest in the individual, but rarely does that apply as well as at Origin. People feel they can make a difference and that we are valued. We are allowed to contribute our talents and have fun doing it. Respect for the individual and concern for the "rest" of a person's life is respected at all levels of management and co-workers. People are genuinely interested in the success of Origin and are allowed to state their ideas and difference of opinion." (Operations)

A Final Note...

The company sincerely appreciates everyone's input for the 1992 survey. While in some cases, procedures have been implemented to address specific concerns identified in the survey, you can be sure that these results will guide our future efforts as well.