

## Ask the Expert

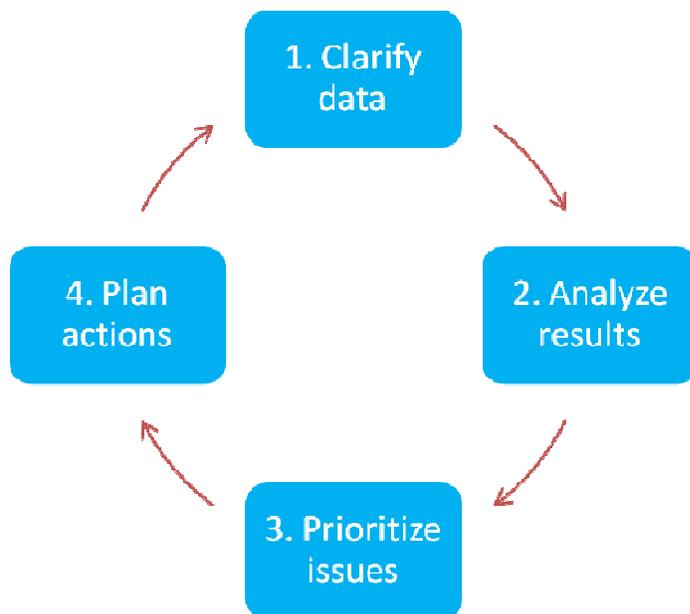
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**Q:** Our staff survey has shown that a high proportion of staff (over 40%) doesn't feel that the senior leadership is in touch with the grassroots of the organisation. How can we improve this result?



**A:** Before digging into ways to address this issue specifically, let's step back and look at a process for analyzing survey results in total. Figure 1, below, shows four steps to follow.

Figure 1. Analyzing Survey Results and Planning Follow-Up Actions



1. Clarify what the data suggest.

- What are the perceived strengths?
- What's a cause of concern?
- Where are results mixed?

2. Analyze what's behind the results.

- Why might people have responded the way they did?
- What comes as a surprise?
- What could be the root cause of a problem?

3. Choose the top issues to address.

- What seems to be an overarching concern?
- What's the financial, operational or reputational risk if an issue is left unaddressed?
- Do the benefits of fixing an issue outweigh the costs?

4. Plan actions to fix top-priority issues.

- What needs to be accomplished?
- What's required in terms of resources, capital, etc.?
- Who will be accountable for ensuring an action is completed?
- By when will an action be completed?

### Clarifying data

Starting at step 1, in addition to the issue of senior leaders appearing out of touch with the grassroots, what does the rest of the survey feedback suggest? To aid in the analysis, you'll want to establish guidelines for characterizing each survey topic. For instance, you might organize the data like this:

65% or more favorable	=	Strength
50% to 64% favorable	=	Mixed reaction
49% or less favorable, or 25% or more unfavorable	=	Cause for concern

### Analyzing results

Now that you've clarified how people feel about a range of issues, the next step is to analyze what's behind the results. From the survey, you know *what* people think, but you don't necessarily know *why* they think it. To find out, you might do any or all of the following:

- **Conduct a companywide action-planning process.** Have each successive layer of management – starting at the lowest level – discuss companywide and workgroup-level survey results with their teams and then suggest actions to build on strengths and address areas of concern. These action plans then get passed to the next level of management, who in turn follows the same process.
- **Hold staff focus groups** to probe specific causes for concern, like senior leadership appearing out of touch with the grassroots. Ask participants what they believe to be the origin of the problem. What personal experiences have they had in this area? What do they think would change people's perceptions?
- **Talk to staff proxies**, such as HR representatives, supervisors and others in touch with staff views, to probe the relevant issues described above.

### Setting Priorities

You should now have a good idea of what's behind the survey results as well as suggestions for addressing an array of concerns. You must then decide whether fixing a concern is indeed a priority. You might consider: Would fixing a concern have other ancillary benefits? Does a concern pose significant risk to the organization if not addressed? Do the potential benefits derived from fixing the concern outweigh the costs of doing so?

### Planning Action

Coming out of step 3, you will know how to fix key concerns and where to focus your energy. Going back to the issue of senior leaders appearing out of touch with the grassroots, let's suppose that fixing

this issue – compared to fixing other issues – is indeed a top priority. Based on what you’ve learned in the action-planning analysis, you might consider starting or increasing any of the following:

- **Senior leader visits to grassroots sites** to chat informally with staff.
- **Senior leader town hall meetings** at grassroots sites, with brief presentations and Q&A.
- **Monthly lunch or breakfast meetings** between senior leaders and grassroots staff.
- **Having senior leaders do the jobs of grassroots staff** for a day.
- **Periodic pulse surveys** and/or facilitated listening sessions at grassroots sites.

The effectiveness of any of these suggestions will hinge on your understanding of the real problem. Keep in mind: “being out of touch” can mean different things. Perhaps survey respondents think senior leaders don’t understand the operational challenges grassroots staff face. Or maybe they believe senior leaders are divorced from the views of customers. Or they could feel senior leaders have a good handle on the business, but don’t care about people at the lower levels. Understanding the mindset of grassroots staff – and knowing what they believe will fix a problem – will help you address the problem at the root cause.