



INVESTING
ETHNICITY

EFFECTIVE AND IMPACTFUL LISTENING SESSIONS

A TOOLKIT FOR ORGANISATIONS

LISTENING SESSIONS INFORMATION GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Listening sessions: facilitated forums designed to be a platform for individuals or groups to share their thoughts, feedback, or concerns on a subject.

Listening sessions are useful tools for organisations to gather authentic, valuable data from their employees on a variety of subjects or challenges the company is facing.

They can be facilitated by Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) or HR leaders, or third-party facilitators. For organisations, the main objective of listening session is to use the data gathered to make well-informed, impactful changes.

Organisations conduct listening sessions for the following reasons:



Understanding lived experiences of ethnic minority colleagues



Insights informs policy, strategy, and drives change



Contributing to psychological safety



Platforming underrepresented colleagues



Matrix recommendation: Hold a series of focus groups or listening sessions to better understand the lived experiences of ethnically diverse employees.

THE JOURNEY OF A LISTENING SESSION

The journey of a listen session goes beyond the idea of giving colleagues a platform to share their thoughts is conceived. It's crucial to be conscious of every stage of the journey, from determining the challenge your organisation would like to address to evaluating the impact of these listening after they have been conducted.

A listening session can be described as having four phases in a ten-step journey, outlined in Figure 1 and the following page.

Consider listening sessions as a medium inform your organisation's DEI strategy and address concerns relating to inclusion as opposed to an event (or series of events). Considering listening sessions in phases is useful to ensure a thorough, impactful session and allows you to be able to successfully address concerns that arise.

This will also be useful in evaluating impact once the session has been completed and relevant actions have been implemented.

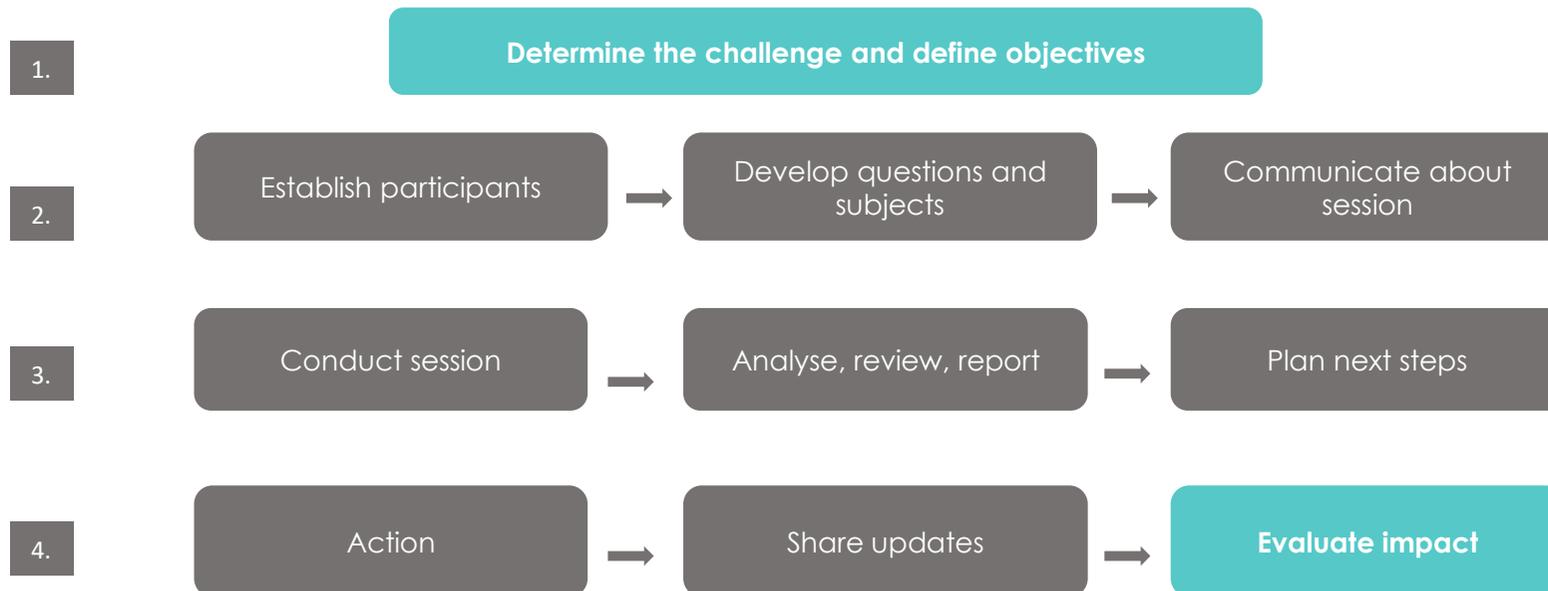


Fig. 1. The journey of a listening session.

Tip: Utilise your multicultural employee network group committee for support including feedback on questions and reaching your desired demographic.

PREPARATION: THE JOURNEY OF A LISTENING SESSION

Phase 1 **Step 1: Determine the challenge and define the objectives.** What is the challenge that needs to be addressed? What do you aim to accomplish by hosting a listening session? The challenge also informs who will participate in the session.

Phase 2 **Step 2: Establish participants.** Who does this challenge affect? Be conscious of asking the right people the right questions as their feedback is the data you require. For example, if a challenge is primarily affecting East and South East Asian (ESEA) colleagues, the session should be held primarily for their input.

Step 3: Develop questions. Prepare categories and overarching questions based on topics you would like to hear feedback on. These should guide the session, and other subtopics or questions will unfold naturally. Remember to start off the session with an icebreaker!

Step 4: Communicate about the session. Send communications out to participants contextualising the session: include 'ground rules', how answers will be used, and topics that would be covered.

Phase 3 **Step 5: Conduct the session.**

Phase 3 **Step 6: Analyse, review, report internally.** Analyse and review the data gathered from sessions. Identify if there are any themes and if appropriate, identify trends in other aspects of the business such as employee relations cases or attrition rates. Report these internally to any relevant members of the team.

Step 7: Plan next steps. Plan actions to be taken in response to findings. Do findings warrant a task-force or committee to implement changes that will address concerns?

Phase 4 **Step 8: Action.** Implement changes. Examples of outputs from listening sessions can be found on page 8.

Step 9: Share updates. Colleagues will expect changes as a result of sharing their insights. Share updates with colleagues addressing action taken in response to concerns raised to avoid negatively affecting organisational culture and psychological safety.

Step 10: Evaluate impact. How will success be measured? Metrics, action taken, and other supporting data can inform you of impact. Compare pre-listening session data to post-listening session data for a full picture.

LISTENING SESSIONS AND DATA

Listening sessions, when done correctly, can bring valuable insights. Information from sessions contextualise the challenge your organisation is facing. Conducting effective sessions allows you to understand why a challenge is occurring and how this challenge is affecting colleagues.

In some cases, you would be able to use these insights to identify trends within your organisation. For example, lived experiences and anecdotes about discrimination can be cross-referenced against employee relations cases or data from exit interviews.

Sessions offer **qualitative** and **quantitative** data, both of which will allow you to gain a clearer picture of the concerns raised. This data will be useful when exploring solutions to issues raised in sessions and will fortify a case you wish to bring forward. Data is essential for executive buy-in on initiatives you may wish to implement.

It will also be beneficial in evaluating the impact of your listening session and subsequent initiatives. Figure 2 below puts both data types into perspective.

Quantitative Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers the question "how many" • Provides a number/statistic • Allows for measuring • Provides opportunity for a statistical analysis

Qualitative Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers the question "why" • Provides instances or observations • Provides opportunity for interpretations • Allows for anecdotes and lived experiences

Fig. 2. The information received from qualitative and quantitative data.

Tip: Utilise your multicultural employee network group committee for support including feedback on questions and reaching your desired demographic.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

The efficacy of a listening session depends on several factors. This section explores main factors to be considered if you would like to host a listening session.



Skilled facilitator

Listening sessions are facilitated to ensure their smooth running, with facilitators skilled in empathy, compassion, tact, and the ability to warm up colleagues. Organisations have found the most success using a third-party facilitator.



Date, time, location

In-person sessions have better success than virtual sessions. Note that the optimum time for a listening session is 60-90 minutes.



Topics and questions

Be conscious of asking the right people the right questions. For example, if a challenge affects your East and South East Asian colleagues, it would be their input that is needed.



Actions

Post-session, actions cannot occur overnight. Consider how points raised will inform your wider DEI strategy, and how you can develop solutions that effectively address these concerns.



Colleague support and wellbeing

How can staff receive support on more sensitive issues raised in sessions which affect their wellbeing, such as the impacts of discrimination while at work? Signpost staff to support after sessions.



Survey fatigue

Listening sessions should be held periodically, or as needed to gain insights on a specific challenge. Hosting them too often will lead to lower employee engagement.

ACTIONING POINTS

The two crucial aspects of listening sessions are its outputs and the data collected from the session. Although the insights gathered from sessions is a key part of informing your organisation's relevant strategies, the actions that are taken as a result of points raised communicates to colleagues that your organisation listens to staff, is dedicated to creating an inclusive environment, and considers their feedback.

Not acting or addressing concerns raised in listening sessions will negatively affect psychological safety of ethnic minority colleagues, may contribute to higher attrition rates amongst ethnic minority staff, and may erode organisational culture. This will ultimately lead to lower productivity and costly, frequent staff turnover.

Certainly, certain points may be easier to implement than others. For example, feedback from Muslim colleagues about non-inclusive food options in the firm's canteen can be solved by providing halal meal options. Efforts to address points must be communicated to colleagues regardless of their difficulty. The next page shares outcomes that member organisations have experienced following successful listening sessions.



EXAMPLES OF OUTCOMES

The following outcomes of listening sessions have been shared by our network of organisations.

INCLUSIVE POLICIES

- Creating a (multi-faith) prayer room in the office
- More halal food options in the canteen
- Consideration to colleagues during religious observances, e.g. Ramadan.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL AWARENESS

- Not using the acronym BAME or BME, instead referring to the specific ethnic group
- Acknowledgement of cultural or heritage celebrations, such as Black History Month, South Asian History Month, or East and South East Asian Heritage Month

REPRESENTATION, PROGRESSION, DEVELOPMENT

- Career development programmes and initiatives for ethnic minority colleagues
- Equally thorough appraisals and relevant feedback for ethnic minority colleagues
- DEI targets or KPIs for leadership



ORGANISATION CASE STUDIES

COMPANY A: PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATION

Challenge: Employee Retention

Company A has high rates of its Black and Asian colleagues leaving the organisation.

A series of listening sessions reveal that Black and Asian colleagues are not given adequate appraisals by line managers. Colleagues share that this leaves them feeling undervalued and less visible than White colleagues.

Reviewing inputs allowed Company A to understand uncertainty about their career progression and professional development was causing Black and Asian staff to leave the company.

Outcome: Company A rolls out mandatory line manager training to equip managers to give thorough feedback.

COMPANY X: HOSPITALITY ORGANISATION

Challenge: Psychological Safety

Organisation X's ethnic minority colleagues anecdotally share their experiences of racism and discrimination while at work. These experiences are with clients and other staff members and impacted employee wellbeing.

Listening sessions were conducted to better understand the scale of the issue. Sessions revealed colleagues were unsure how to react when witnessing or experiencing racism.

Findings also showed that staff members were not confident action would be taken if incidents were reported.

Outcome: Company X assigns educational anti-racist and ally training to empower colleagues to challenge incidents.

INVESTING IN ETHNICITY: HOW WE CAN SUPPORT YOU

Investing In Ethnicity offers consultations, training programmes that can be bespoke to your organisation, research-informed resources, and a membership subscription with exclusive benefits. Our offerings ensure that you are supporting your ethnic minority colleagues and building an ethnically and racially inclusive workplace.

The Maturity Matrix is a free, government-backed benchmarking tool that acts as a framework for ethnic inclusion in the workplace. It has been informed by organisations across industries and avoids the lengthy process of benchmarking your organisation against others. Learn more about the Matrix [here](#).





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