

LISTENING SESSION TEMPLATE

Take the themes *back to the room*.

A working template for planning and running a listening session after a survey, and sharing what you heard. Replace anything in [brackets], and adapt the wording to sound like your company.

Full guide: stephenduke.com/listening-session

What's inside

- **1. Invite email** to send a week or so ahead
- **2. Session plan:** details, opening, ground rules, agenda and prompts
- **3. Notes by theme** to fill in during the session
- **4. Summary for leaders** to share what you heard after all sessions

1. Invite email

Send it from someone people trust, and keep the tone plain and warm.

Subject: Help us read the survey results right

Hi [name or group],

We've been reading through the results from [survey name]. Before we turn them into action plans, we want to make sure we're reading them right, and we'd love your help.

You're invited to a [60]-minute listening session on [date and time] with others in [group].

What to expect

- We'll walk through the top and bottom themes from the survey and talk about what's behind them.
- We won't keep a list of who attends, and nothing you say will be tied to your name or team. Very specific details are harder to keep anonymous, so share what you're comfortable with.
- We won't record the session. A note-taker will capture broad themes only.
- This isn't the place for concerns about a specific person. For those, please reach out to [HR business partner].

What you share will feed into [action planning], and we'll follow up on what came of it by [timeframe].

[Room or meeting link]

Thank you,

[Your name]

2. Session plan

Group	
Date and time	
Format (in person, virtual or hybrid)	
Facilitator	
Note-taker	
Number invited	

Don't record. If you truly need to, say so plainly in the invite and again at the start, and explain who will hear it and when it will be deleted.

Keep groups small enough that everyone gets to talk: roughly 5 to 8 people in person, and a bit smaller online. Run separate sessions for individual contributors, managers and senior leaders.

Themes to bring

Top themes	Bottom themes
[1]	[1]
[2]	[2]
[3]	[3]

Opening

"We're here to talk through what we heard in the survey and make sure we're reading it right. Nothing you say today will be tied to your name or team."

Ground rules

- Keep what's shared in this room private.
- No cross talk.
- Let people finish their point.
- Concerns about a specific person go to [HR business partner], not this session.

Agenda

Time	What happens
0–10	Open, explain confidentiality and set ground rules
10–15	Share the top and bottom themes, and say you want to check your read
15–50	Open up each theme, one at a time
50–60	Recap broad themes, explain what happens next, thank people

Prompts for each theme

- “Here’s what we heard: [theme]. Does that match your experience?”
- “What’s behind that for you?”
- “Is there anything we’re missing, or reading the wrong way?”
- “What would make a difference here?”

Add one for this group

- **Individual contributors:** “Is this something you feel you can raise with your manager?”
- **Managers:** “What would help you support your team on this?”
- **Senior leaders:** “Does this match what you’re hearing from your teams?”

Your own: [prompt]

If the room goes quiet, let it. If it goes on too long, ask the same question another way or move on.

3. Notes by theme

Broad themes only: no names, no teams, and no details specific enough to point to one person.

Theme 1: [name]

What we heard	
What's behind it	
Ideas from the room	

Theme 2: [name]

What we heard	
What's behind it	
Ideas from the room	

Theme 3: [name]

What we heard	
What's behind it	
Ideas from the room	

Anything we missed or read the wrong way

Notes	
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4. Summary for leaders

Combine notes from all sessions. Report groups and numbers, never names.

Sessions held	
Groups and number of people	

What we heard

Theme	What people said is behind it	Ideas from the room
[theme]		
[theme]		
[theme]		

Where our first read was off

[Themes that meant something different in the room than they did in the data]

What surprised us

[Anything new that didn't show up in the survey]

What we'll share back, and when

[What employees will hear about what came of this, including what can't change yet and why, and by when]