



Guide: Investigating Reality Interviews

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Only Wimps and Egomaniacs Are Afraid to Investigate Their Company's Reality

ACHIEVE BRAND INTEGRITY

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Guide: Investigating Reality Interviews

Part 1: Overview

Powerful thinking occurs when you have the opportunity to explore various viewpoints. Are you ready to challenge closely held assumptions about what's really going on in your company? Doing so will help you to learn, in great detail, the current state of your people's beliefs, which will enable you to make smarter decisions to improve in the future.

Conducting Investigating Reality Interviews will help your company to:

1. Eliminate hidden agendas, leading to more efficient brand strategy development.
2. Engage leadership to share important insights, providing direction for brand strategy development.
3. Provide a realistic picture of what's really going on with your brand (your company).

It is recommended that you hire a trained interviewer to conduct discussions with leaders and employees in your company. This will provide an objective observer, as well as help to build trust in sharing perceptions.



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Part 2: **Setting Up Interviews**

Schedule 45 minute, face-to-face conversations with key leaders. These conversations (interviews) *must* be strictly confidential. Confidentiality is extremely important to ensuring respondents feel comfortable and provide accurate information.

It might be helpful to send out an e-mail to those participating in an Investigating Reality Interview that contains:

1. Details concerning the purpose of the interview: what the company hopes to achieve, why they were chosen to participate, etc.
2. A reminder about the confidentiality.
3. A description of what is going to be done with the results (consolidated, summarized, and analyzed to help the company in building brand strategy).
4. A few "thought-starters," i.e., questions to get the person thinking about the company brand prior to the interview.



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Part 3: Exploring the Seven Realities

From a brand-building perspective, there are typically seven different realities for you to investigate.

Reality 1: Achieving Desired Business Results

This is the “how are we doing” reality. What have been the results of the company’s efforts, in the eyes of its customers, employees, and other key stakeholders? What quantitative and qualitative feedback does the company have to measure its success at attaining goals and objectives?

Reality 2: Driving Desired Culture

It is up to leadership to provide the focus and direction to drive the desired behaviors that inspire and motivate employees to deliver exceptional service to customers. How are behaviors defined and shared? The leadership team is responsible for focusing the entire organization on creating value for customers.

Reality 3: Knowing Your Target Customers

What are the most important segments, buyers, influencers, and end-users in the decision-making process for purchasing your product and/or service, and what are the desired outcomes they hope to realize in using your offering? How well do your people know the customers they serve? They may know more than you think, and could be holding on to valuable insights that could help you sell more stuff to more people. Or they might not know as much as you think, leading to a diminished overall experience for the end customers.

Reality 4: Understanding Experiences

Customers and employees have experiences with your company and its products/services every day. How well do you understand the experiences that employees and customers have? These experiences must be understood and managed in order to positively influence the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that drive desired results.

Reality 5: Recognizing Your Company’s Brand Positioning

Positioning is about owning a place in the mind of your target customers. It is their perceptions (whether positive or negative) that define “who you are” in the marketplace. Unless your leaders and employees understand the positioning your company is vying for, it is very difficult for them to understand the relevance of their actions to strengthening that positioning. How well do you positively shape or influence what customers think? Uncovering employee perceptions about your unique (or not unique) positioning is critical to knowing how aligned your people are with your strategy.

Reality 6: Implementing Important Initiatives

Internal brand awareness and understanding is the first step to operationalizing your company’s brand. Once employees throughout the company truly understand the brand and its relevance to their job, they can begin to live it every day through their behaviors. Implementing the brand takes patience and persistence. Detailed action plans, programs, and processes are often necessary to rally and motivate



employees to “live the brand.” How well do you establish goals and objectives with reasonable timelines for achieving them? Asking leaders for their thoughts about how well your company develops action plans and assigns responsibilities and ownership will provide you great insight into their confidence level and frustrations when it comes to implementation.

Reality 7: Marketing Effectively to Customers

Most marketing activities are expensive and difficult to measure for success. A well-defined brand strategy adds purpose and directional clarity in regards to who to target and how to allocate resources for marketing efforts. Are your marketing efforts responsible in the minds of your own people?



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Part 4: Interviewing Questions

Conducting Investigating Reality Interviews will afford you a unique blend of emotional and rational responses that can be summarized and used to:

- Stimulate internal commitment and buy-in for making necessary changes within the company.
- Challenge closely held assumptions that may be prohibiting success.
- Create greater understanding of the current state of the company in order to make smart decisions about future improvements.

When asking questions, first have the respondent rank their response using the following scale. Having respondents rank their responses before they provide an explanation will elicit an emotional response.

1 = Exceptional	5 = Inadequate
2 = Very Good	6 = Poor
3 = Good	7 = None
4 = Adequate	

After the respondent has provided a ranking, ask him or her to tell you the reason for the answer. This will provide more insight into the logic behind his or her thinking. The ranking scale approach ensures both emotional and rational input from each interview participant.

Using the following questions, investigate your company's reality in the minds of your leaders. Once you have their perspective, you can administer the same set of questions (with slight modification) to gain feedback from employees. The numbered questions are the primary questions to be asked. The bulleted questions are secondary and should be selected/used on an as-needed basis.

Reality 1: Achieving Desired Business Results

1. How well do operational and financial results reflect high performance of the company in comparison to its best competitors?
 - How is the current financial performance?
 - > What are the expected trends? Return on assets? Profit? Balance sheet? Cash flow?
 - What is the current operational performance and what are the trends?
 - > Productivity? Cost of quality? Cycle time?
 - Is supplier performance providing a competitive advantage?



2. How well have goals concerning employee motivation and satisfaction been achieved?
 - Are employees motivated to achieve superior results for customers?
 - Does employee feedback indicate successful HR management strategies?
 - Does the company realize diversity through employee development, teamwork, and management leadership?

Reality 2: Driving Desired Culture

1. How well does the company provide the leadership and customer focus needed to achieve world-class performance?
 - Does the leadership team focus the organization on customer satisfaction as the basic business principle (critical success factor) for the company?
 - Does the leadership team provide a vision and strategic direction to help the company achieve desired business results?
 - Are the vision, strategic direction, and company goals aligned and communicated to all employees?
 - Does management promote and “live” high ethical standards?
 - Do employees understand their role in helping the organization achieve world-class performance?
2. How well do employees understand company goals and objectives?
 - Do employees understand specific goals and objectives that they will be held accountable for achieving?
 - Are personal performance evaluations used consistently to align an employee’s personal development with the achievement of organizational objectives?
 - > Are performance evaluations conducted consistently?
 - > Are the results used to enhance individual and organizational success?
3. How well do HR (talent management) processes enable the company to recruit, hire, train, and develop high-performing individuals?
 - How effective are recruitment activities?
 - How effective are employee evaluation activities?
 - How effective are reward and recognition systems?
 - Does the company measure employee motivation and satisfaction?
 - > Are the results acted upon?
4. How well is management aligned with respect to:
 - The most important business objectives?
 - > Are plans in place for the achievement of specific business objectives this year?
 - > How successful has the company been in reaching stated business objectives?
 - > What has helped or hindered progress?
 - The perception of the company in the marketplace?



- > What do customers presume about the company?
- The makeup of the primary target audiences?
- > Who are the most important market segments for the organization to target with its products and/or services?

Reality 3: Knowing Your Target Customers

1. How well do you understand customers and their wants, needs, and challenges?
 - What are the different markets you serve?
 - Which segments are the most important to focus on today?
 - What do you think are the most effective ways to reach your target segments?
 - How would you prioritize those segments?
 - What do you think are the key purchase drivers for each segment?
 - What do you think are the key influencers for each segment?
 - Does the company have a process for seeking and capturing customers' future needs?
 - Do customer requirements and expectations drive company goals and objectives?
 - Do you recognize internal customers and value their requirements?
 - Does the company maintain and utilize a database of past, present, and potential customers in order to identify fulfilled and unfulfilled customer requirements?
2. How well has the company achieved customers' desired results?
 - What is the current customer satisfaction level and trend?
 - > What is some common customer feedback?
 - What are the levels and trends in quality of products/services delivered?
 - > Do products and services perform as expected?
3. How well does the company manage customer relationships to enhance satisfaction, loyalty, and referrals?
 - How do you guarantee that your products and services will satisfy customers' needs?
 - Are all employees responsible for managing customer relationships?
 - What efforts are made to assist customers in referring your company to potential customers?
 - Are customers able to make inquiries and complaints and receive a quick response and resolution?
 - Are employees motivated to deliver exceptional service and value to customers?
4. How well does the company capture customer satisfaction data and utilize the information for improvement?
 - Is the measurement of customer satisfaction a key business process with defined roles and responsibilities?
 - Do you quickly measure customer satisfaction following each significant transaction?



- What is the protocol for dissatisfied customers?
 - > Does the company identify and assign resolution responsibility for dissatisfaction and monitor progress?
 - Does the company set priorities and direction for improved customer relation performance in comparison with competitors?
 - Are customer satisfaction levels and trends reported and visibly displayed?
 - Does the company track and analyze customer gains and losses for future improvements?
5. How well does the company understand customers' decision-making process?
- Do you know how to reach the decision-makers?
6. How well does the company know which customers are most valuable today and in the future?

Reality 4: Understanding Experiences

1. How well does the company understand the experiences that employees and customers have?
 - What is it like to do business with the company, its products and services, and its employees?
 - Does the leadership team understand where the greatest points of impact are for influencing the thought process of customers and prospects?
 - What makes for an excellent purchase process as opposed to an adequate or dissatisfying one?
 - Does the company manage points of impact in order to deliver a compelling experience for customers?
 - > What about for employees?
 - Does the company have profound insight into customer values and motivations?
2. How well does the company manage the customer relationship to generate greater loyalty and referrals?
 - What efforts are made to continue building a relationship with customers after a sale?
 - What directly drives customer loyalty for products/services?
 - > What indirectly influences customer loyalty for products/services?
 - How well does the organization say, "Thanks," to customers?
 - > Do employees feel responsible for thanking customers?
 - Does the company effectively capture testimonials from satisfied customers?
 - > How are testimonials incorporated into marketing and promotional processes?
 - What efforts are made for encouraging referrals from satisfied customers?
3. How well do employees articulate what it is that makes the company special (different or unique) in the marketplace?
 - Does the company have relevant success stories that enable it to engage prospects?
 - How well are employees able to convey the most meaningful benefits the company delivers to customers?



- How well do employees understand what makes the company special from a customer perspective?

Reality 5: Recognizing Your Company's Brand Positioning

1. How well does the company positively shape or influence what customers think of it?
 - Can you identify the most important problems that the company solves for customers?
 - Do you know how customers talk about the products and services when recommending them to others?
2. How well does the company positively shape or influence what employees think of it?
3. How well does the company understand what drives brand preference and loyalty within primary target markets?
 - Do customers have an opinion about the company?
 - Do you understand why some customers may switch to a competing company?
 - Do you understand the reasons why customers choose your company over competitors?
 - > Do you know what other companies' customers may have considered?

Reality 6: Implementing Important Initiatives

1. How well does the company establish goals and objectives with reasonable timelines for achieving them?
2. How well does the company devise action plans, set timelines and accountability, and stick to them in order to achieve goals?
3. How well does the company communicate strategic initiatives, establish ownership to drive success, and hold people accountable for implementation results?

Reality 7: Marketing Effectively to Customers

1. How well does the company know where and who customers go to when gathering information about the company's products and services?
 - How well does the company know which of these sources carries the most weight in customers' decisions?
2. How well does the company's current marketing activities drive or support customer acquisition, retention, and referrals?
3. How do current marketing materials (brochures, Web site, advertising, etc.) assist the company with getting more customers?
4. How well do current marketing activities/materials deliver a concise and accurate portrayal of who the company is as an organization and/or a product or service?