

# Two ways to improve your surveys

The Most Crucial Question and the Burning Issue

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#SurveysThatWork2023



# Agenda

A bit about me

Surveys and consultations

Big Honkin' Surveys and Light Touch Surveys

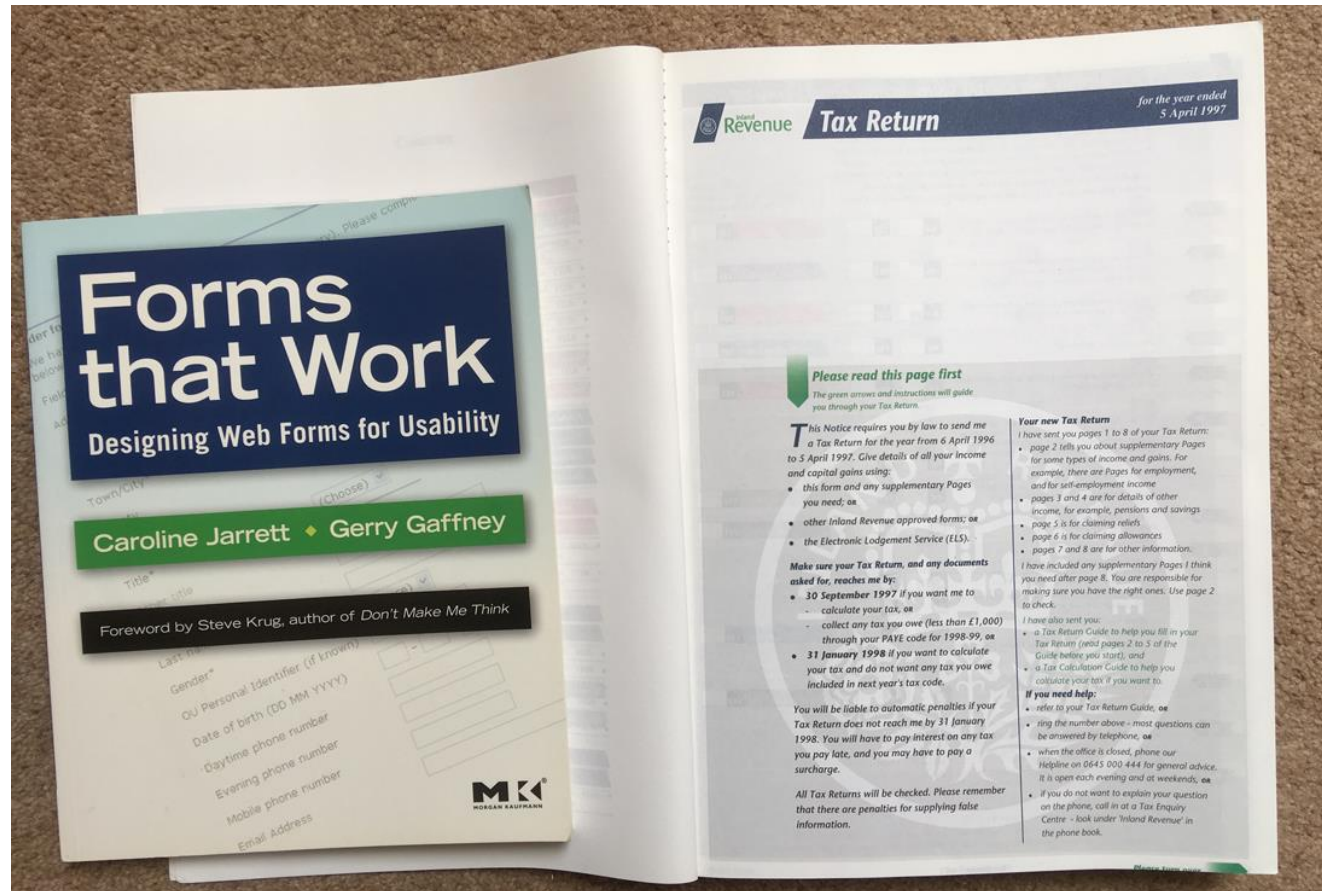
Improve your survey's effectiveness

1. The Most Crucial Question
2. The Burning Issue

Representativeness

The survey process

# I'm interested in questions because I've worked on forms for over 30 years



# Tax stuff arrives in brown envelopes



# The envelope made me think of goals



Allows someone  
to achieve a goal

# People separated the form immediately



Looks like a form and works like a form



Allows someone to achieve a goal

# Within that, there are lots of questions



Looks like a form and works like a form



Asks questions and expects answers



Allows someone to achieve a goal

I turned to the survey literature to learn more,  
especially about questions





\$1 in the envelope beats \$10 guaranteed later



# Response depends on effort, reward and trust

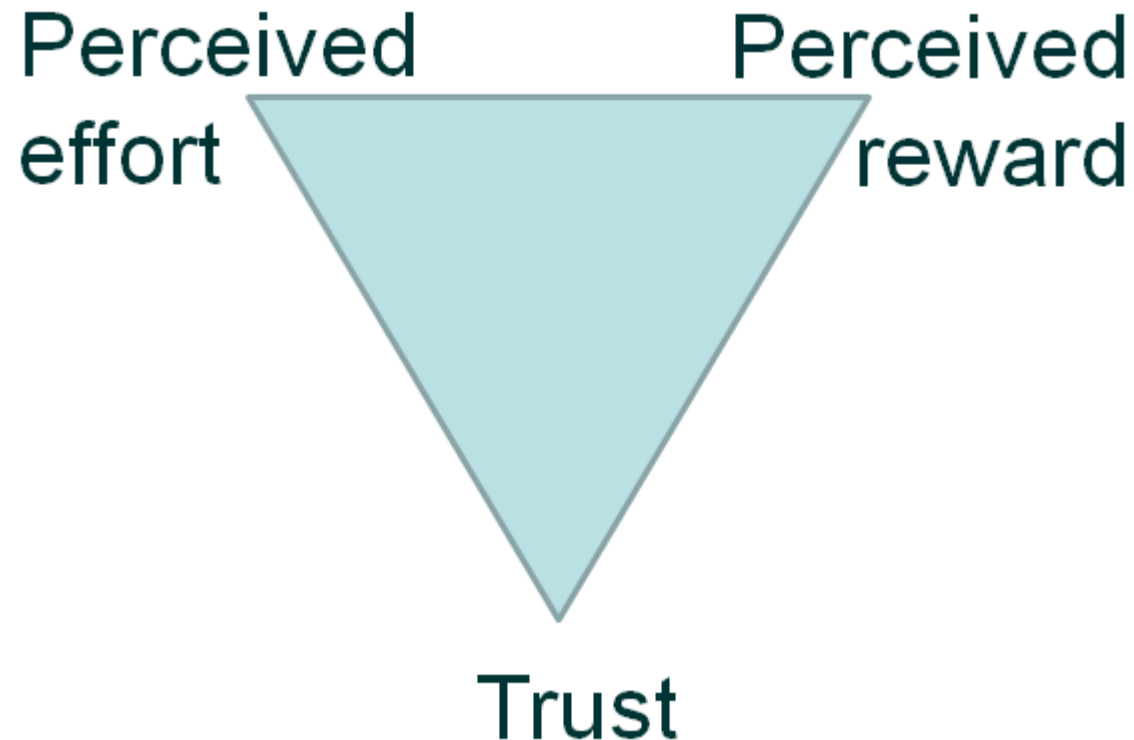
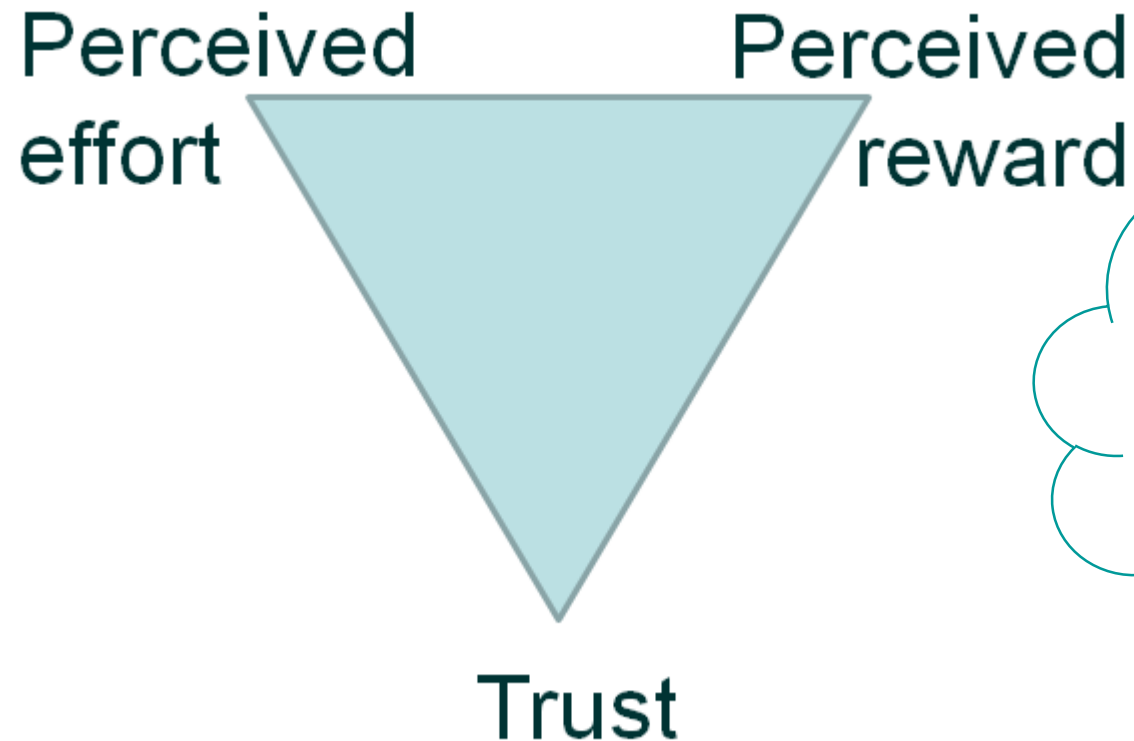


Diagram from Jarrett, C, and Gaffney, G (2008)  
"Forms that work: Designing web forms for usability" inspired by Dillman, D.A. (2000)  
"Internet, Mail and Mixed Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method"

# Perceived effectiveness can be rewarding



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# What's your recent experience with surveys?

- Think of a survey you've seen recently in local government
- What was it about?
- What level of response did it get?
- What decision(s) did it contribute to?



# We looked for some example surveys

Leighton Buzzard	Consult on change of use of council-owned land
Milton Keynes	Feedback after booking an appointment at the tip
West Northants	Dog poo survey as part of researching “Public spaces protection order”
Dacorum	Change a regulation to reflect a change of the name of a law

# This Leighton Buzzard consultation closes on 6 June 2023

## Picture 3: Engagement which has taken place to inform our proposal



2 online workshops with community groups and venues




1-2-1 discussions with CBC officers and the Town Council



120+ survey responses


The team undertook 1-2-1 discussions with officers and the Town Council and organised two online workshops and a digital survey (113 responses and 8 email responses) with community groups and venues about the existing provision of community facilities which also identified any additional requirements. The survey responses showed that:

# Milton Keynes asks for feedback on every transaction


 Milton Keynes City Council

Home Services FAQs My Accounts My Requests GovDelivery

How would you rate your experience with using this site today?



Please add further comments here.....

Skip this step Submit 



# West Northamptonshire tangled with dog poo

Proposal 1. Failure to clean up after your dog. Persons in control of a dog must clean up and remove its faeces, poo or mess from the area and place it in a bin or take it home for disposal.

Question 1A To what extent do you agree or disagree with Proposal 1?

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree  
Don't know

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 11/10/2022 18:00 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#) – questionnaire results from page 159

[Public Spaces Protection Order Consultation: ownership of dogs and prohibition of smoking in certain places. - West Northamptonshire Council - Citizen Space](#)

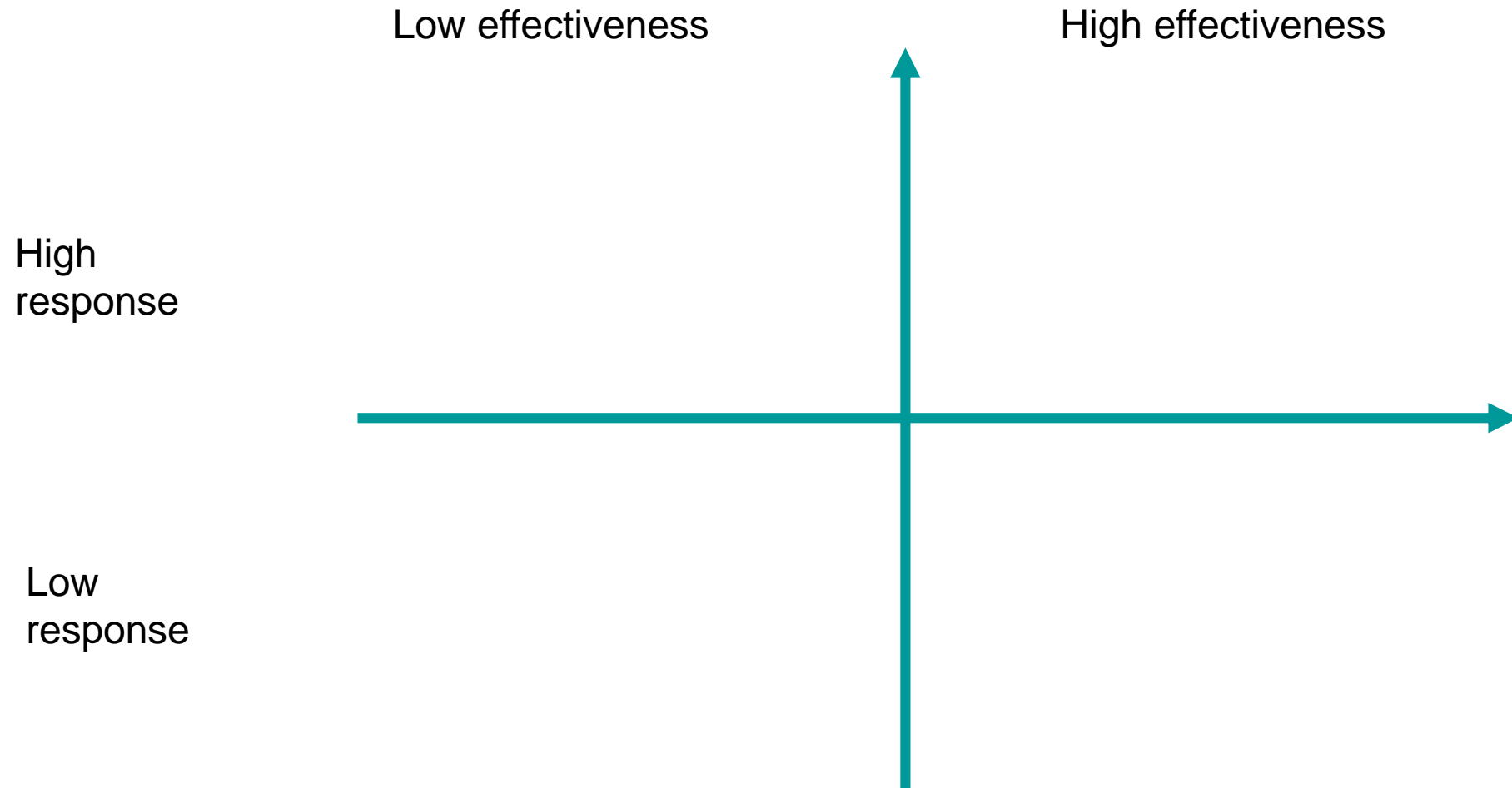
# This Dacorum consultation got no responses

## **1.2 Proposals**

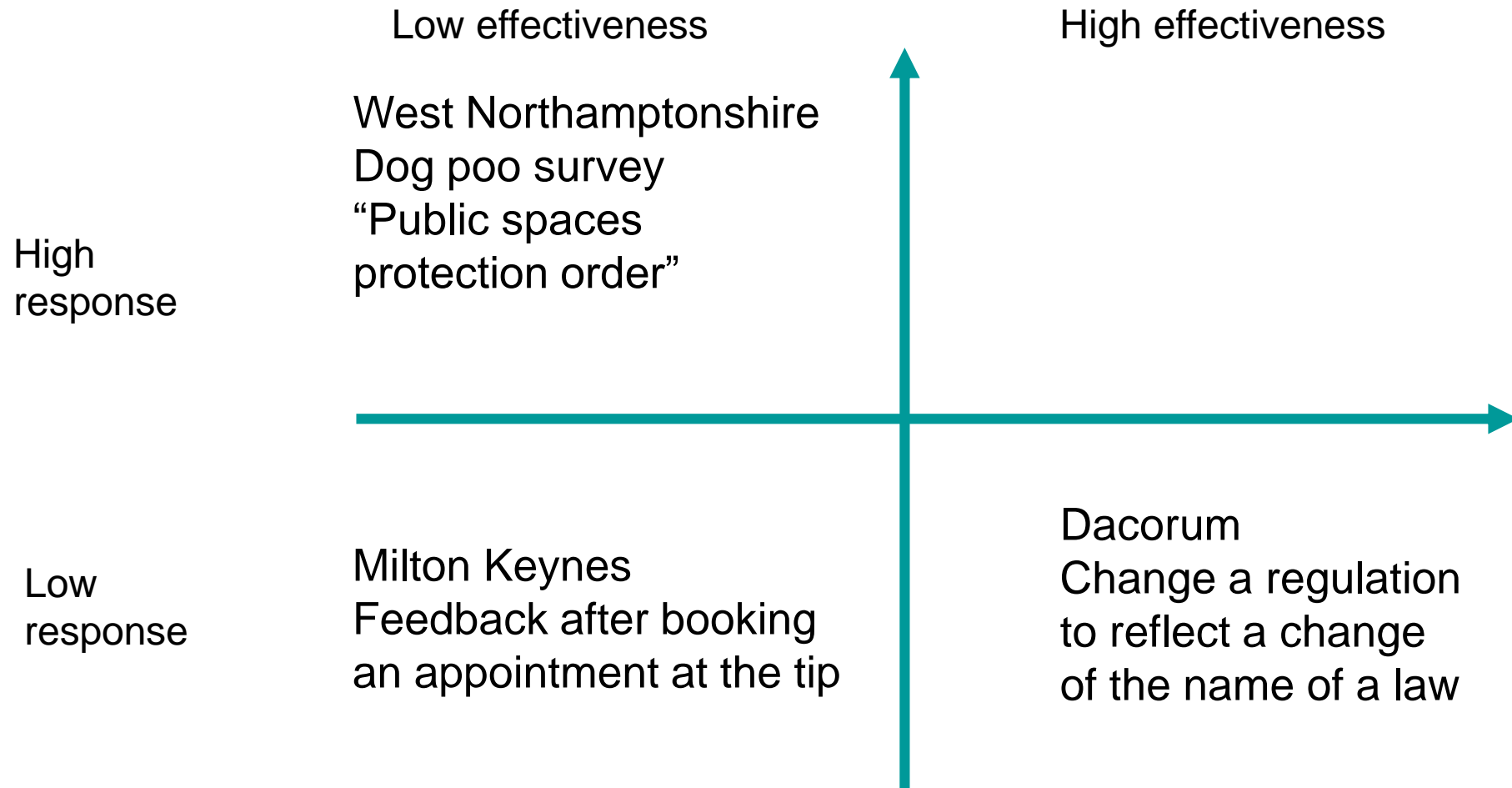
1.2.1 It is proposed to make a minor amendment to the existing THE BOROUGH OF DACORUM (MARLOWES, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD) (ON STREET CHARGING AND WAITING & LOADING RESTRICTIONS) ORDER 2022 ("The Order of 2022") to incorporate recently introduced enforcement legislation.

Article 21 of The Order of 2022 is to be amended by the substitution of the wording "The Civil Enforcement of Parking Contraventions (Guidelines on Levels of Charges) (England) Order 2007" by the wording "The Civil Enforcement of Road Traffic Contraventions (Approved Devices, Charging Guidelines and General Provisions) (England) Regulations 2022".

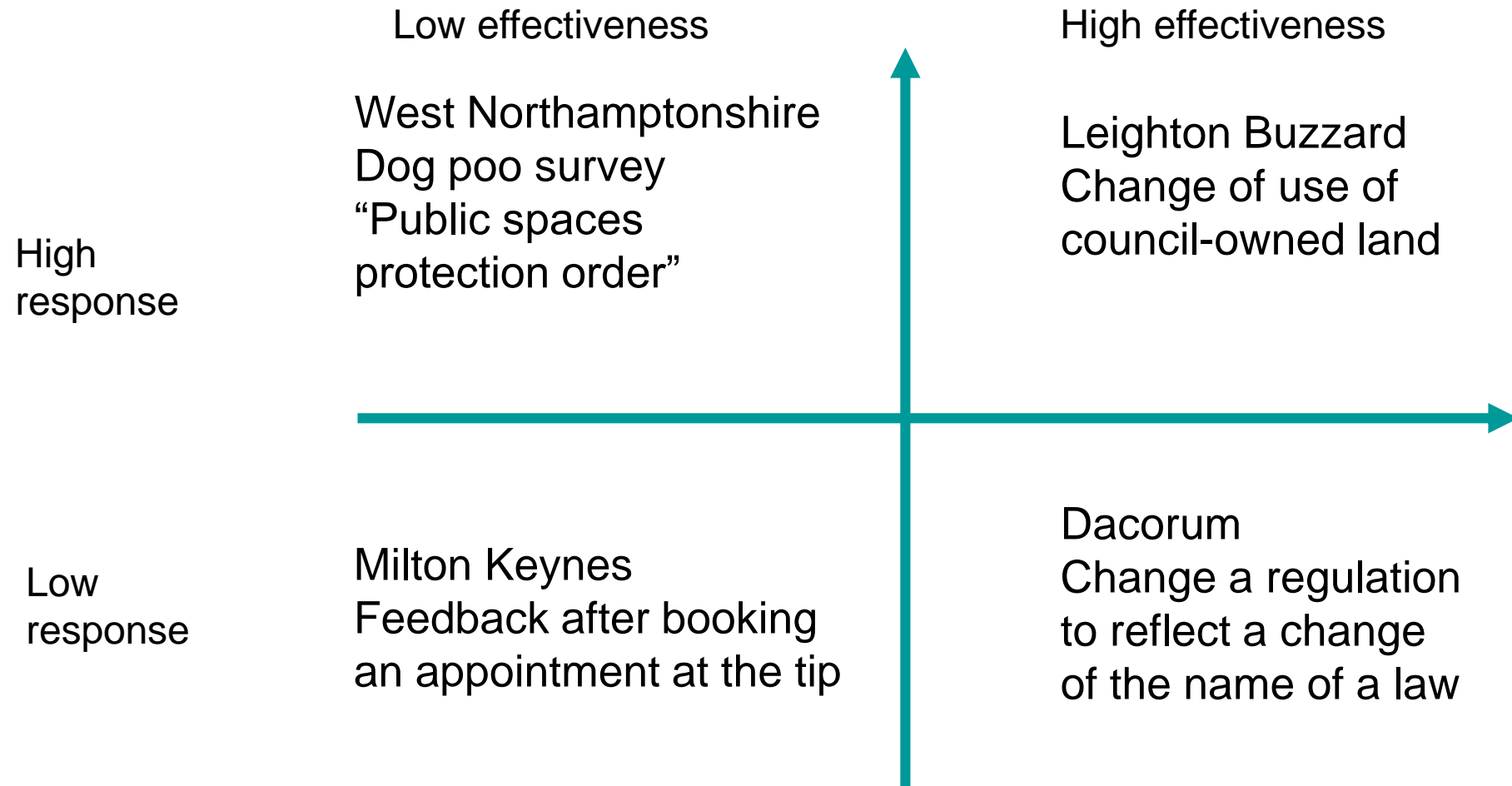
# Let's think about effectiveness and response



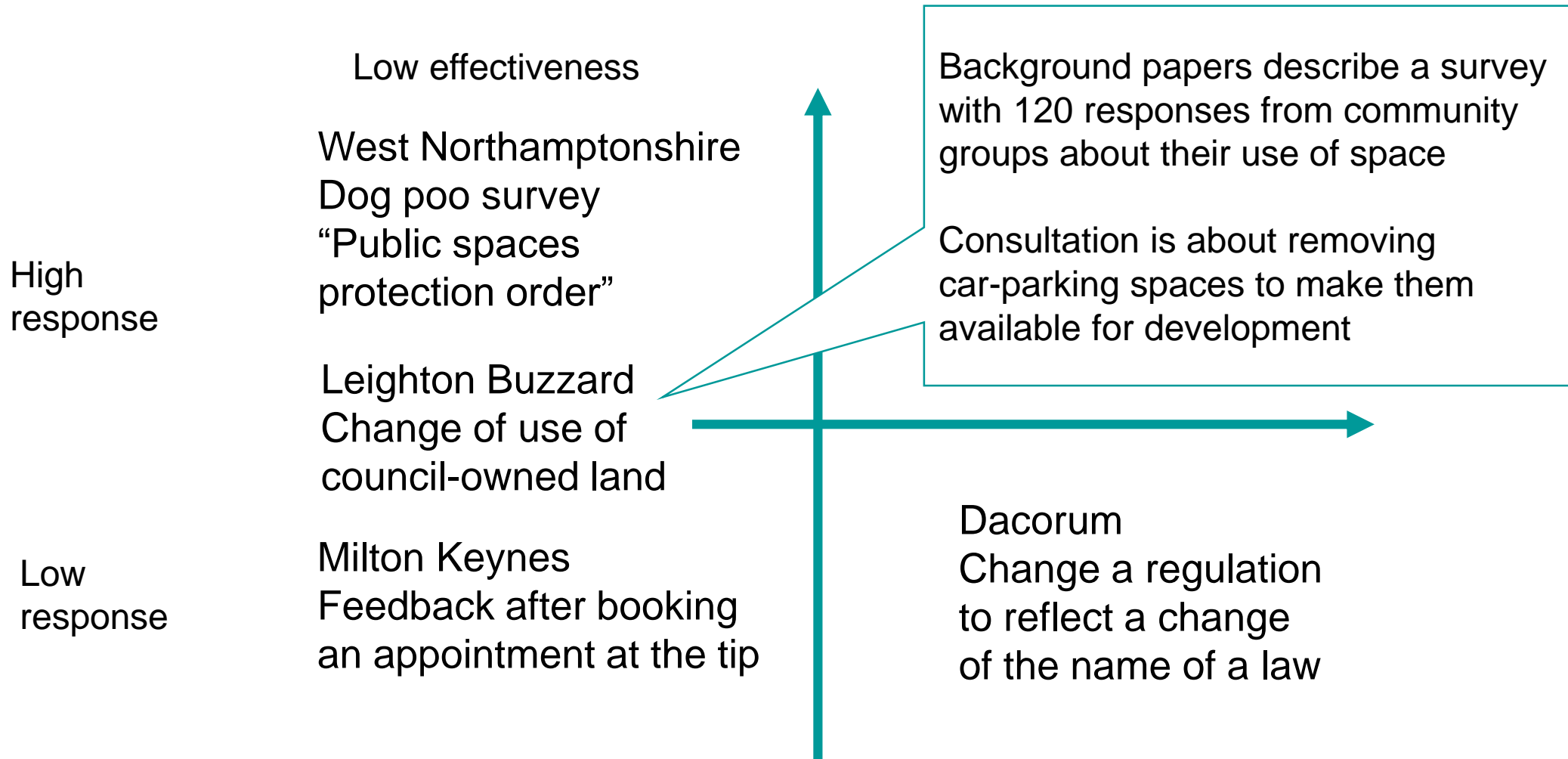
# This is where I'd put three of my examples



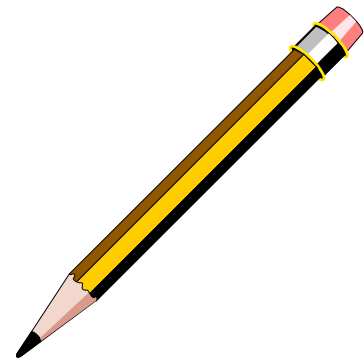
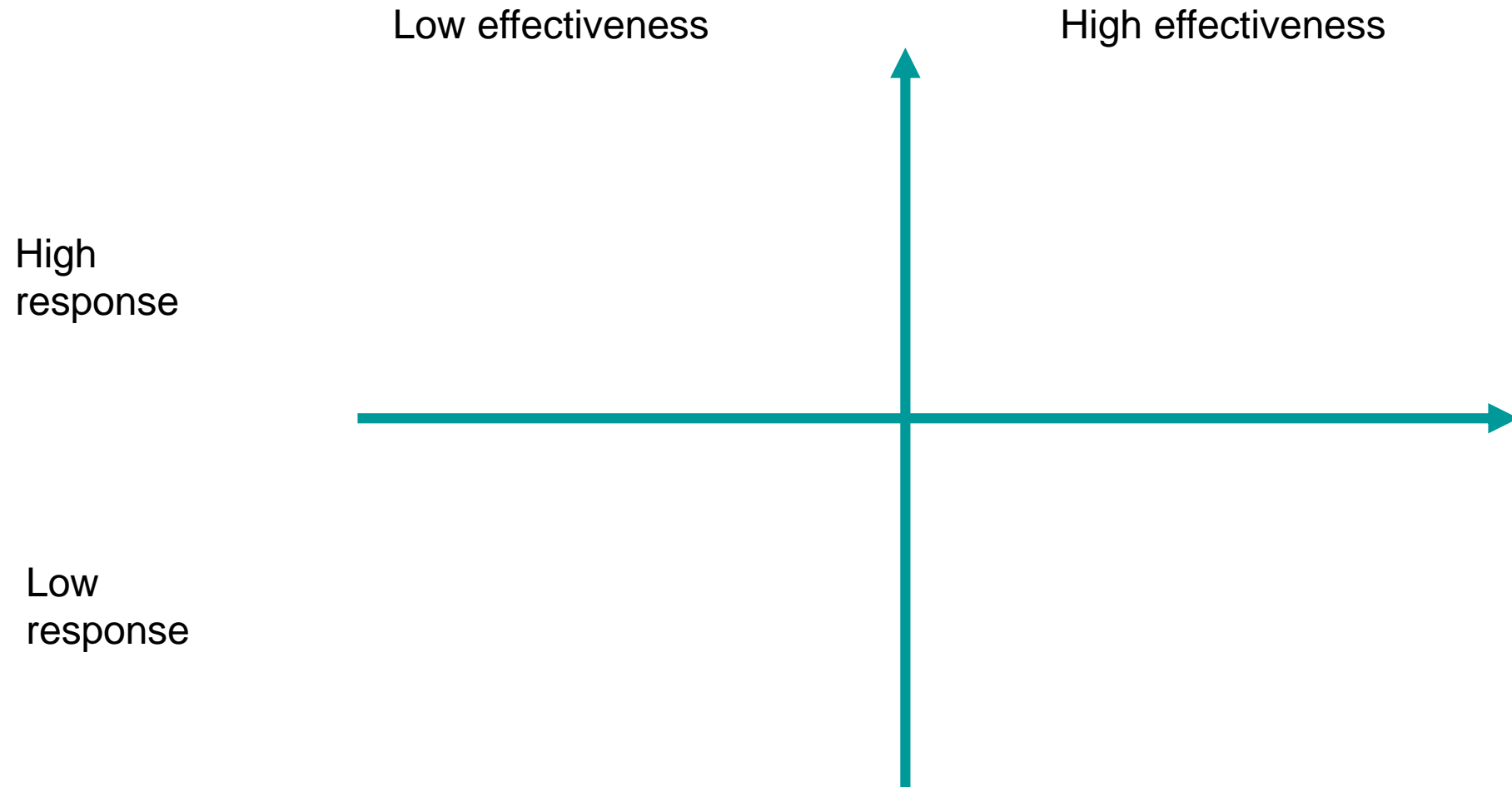
# At first, I rated the Leighton Buzzard one highly



# But I looked into it some more and now, maybe not



# What about the examples you had?



# Agenda

- ✓ A bit about me
- ✓ Surveys and consultations

## Big Honkin' Surveys and Light Touch Surveys

### Improve your survey's effectiveness

1. The Most Crucial Question
2. The Burning Issue

### Representativeness

### The survey process

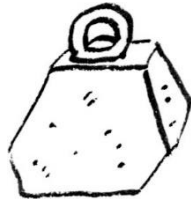


Interviewers  
used to visit  
every respondent



# The 1950s mindset was “Ask Everything”

Survey =  
Big Honkin' Survey

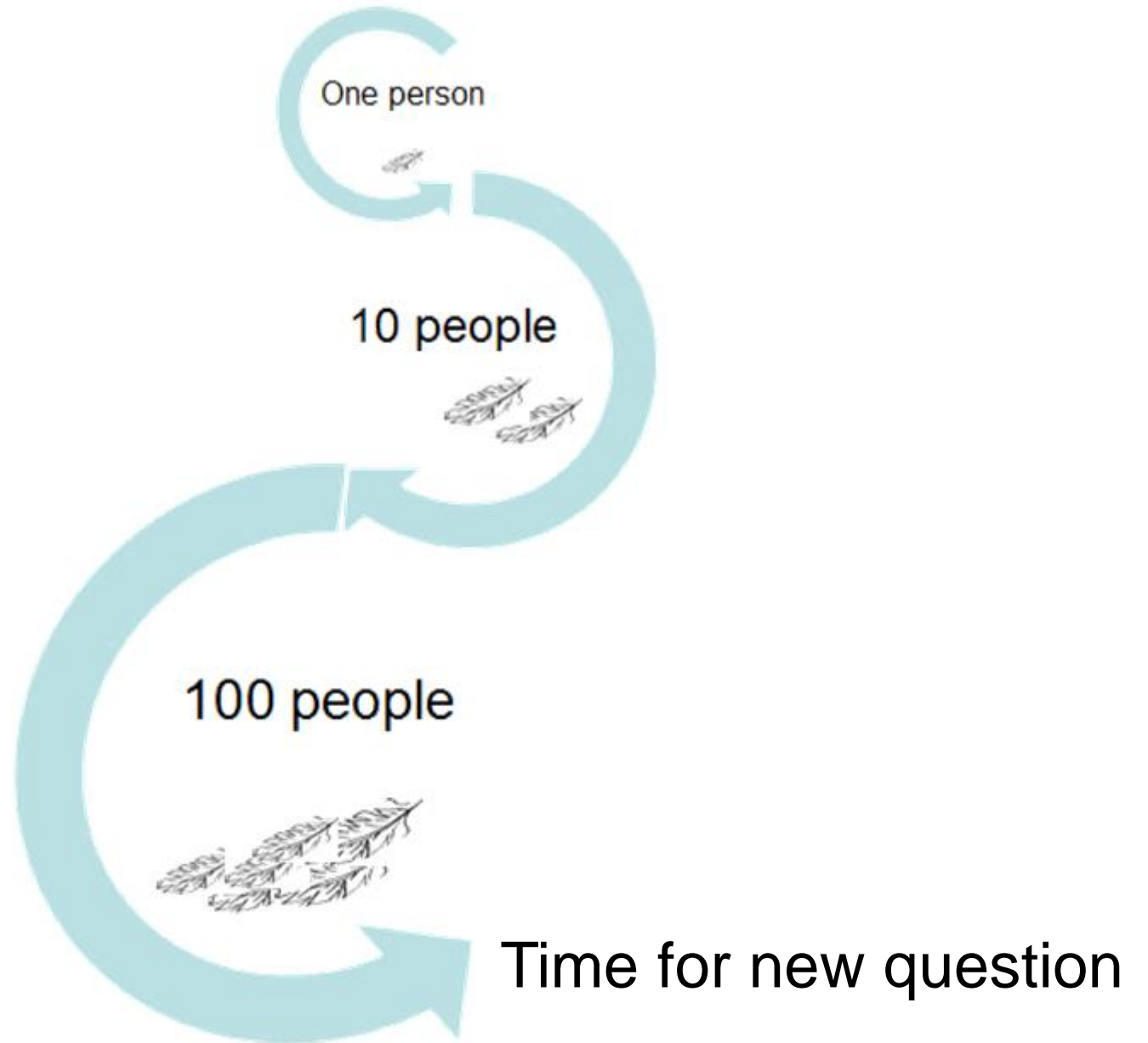


# Now we can do Light Touch surveys

- Choose one question
- Find a person
- Ask the question
- See if you can make one decision
- Improve, iterate, increase



# You can iterate to a larger Light Touch survey



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## Improve your survey's effectiveness

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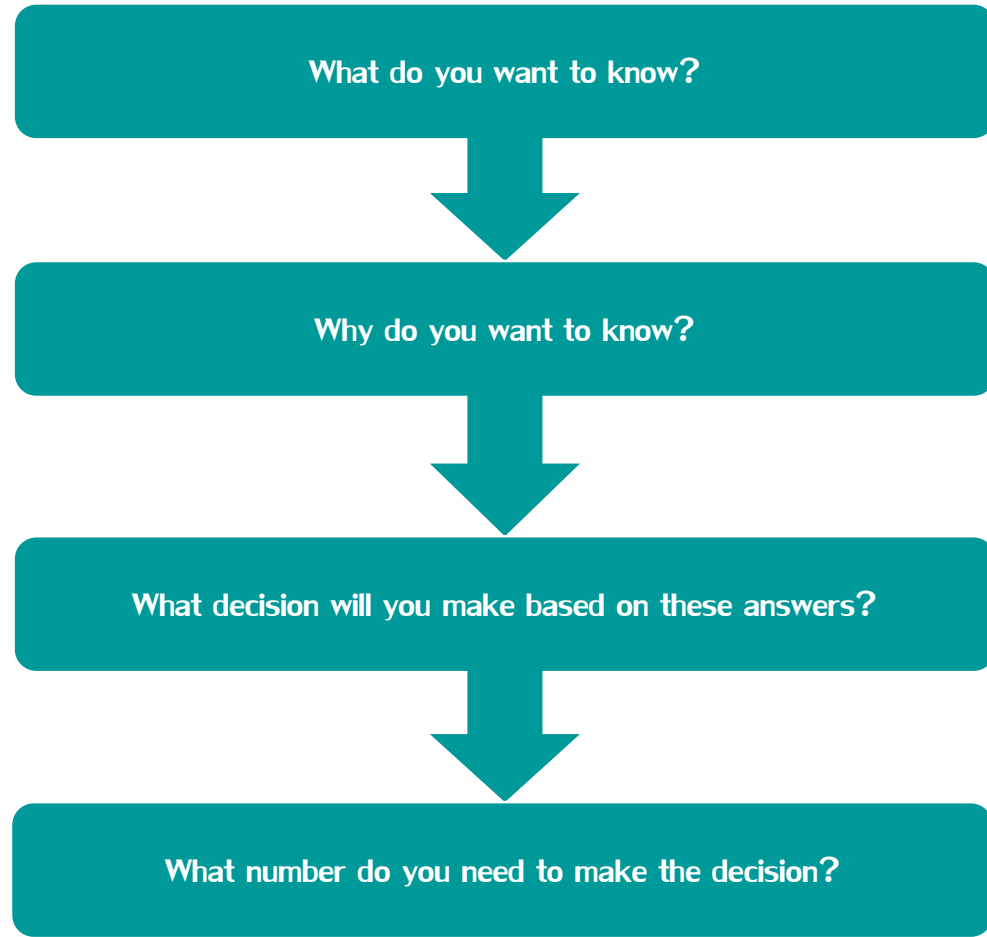
## Representativeness

## The survey process

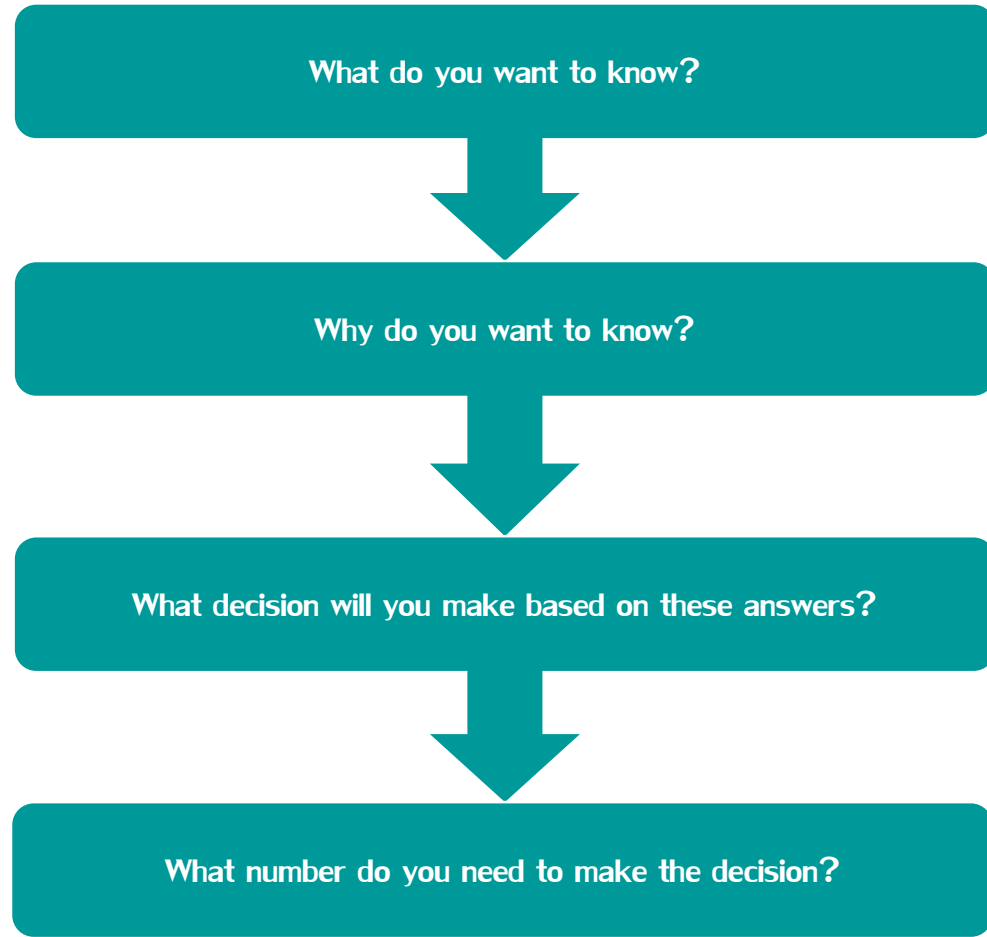
# A survey is an 'ask' method to find out 'how many'

<b>Observe</b>	Usability test Field study	Analytics
<b>Ask</b>	Interview	Survey
	<b>Why?</b> qualitative	<b>How many?</b> quantitative

# Establish your goals for your survey



# Discussing “the number” is the biggest challenge



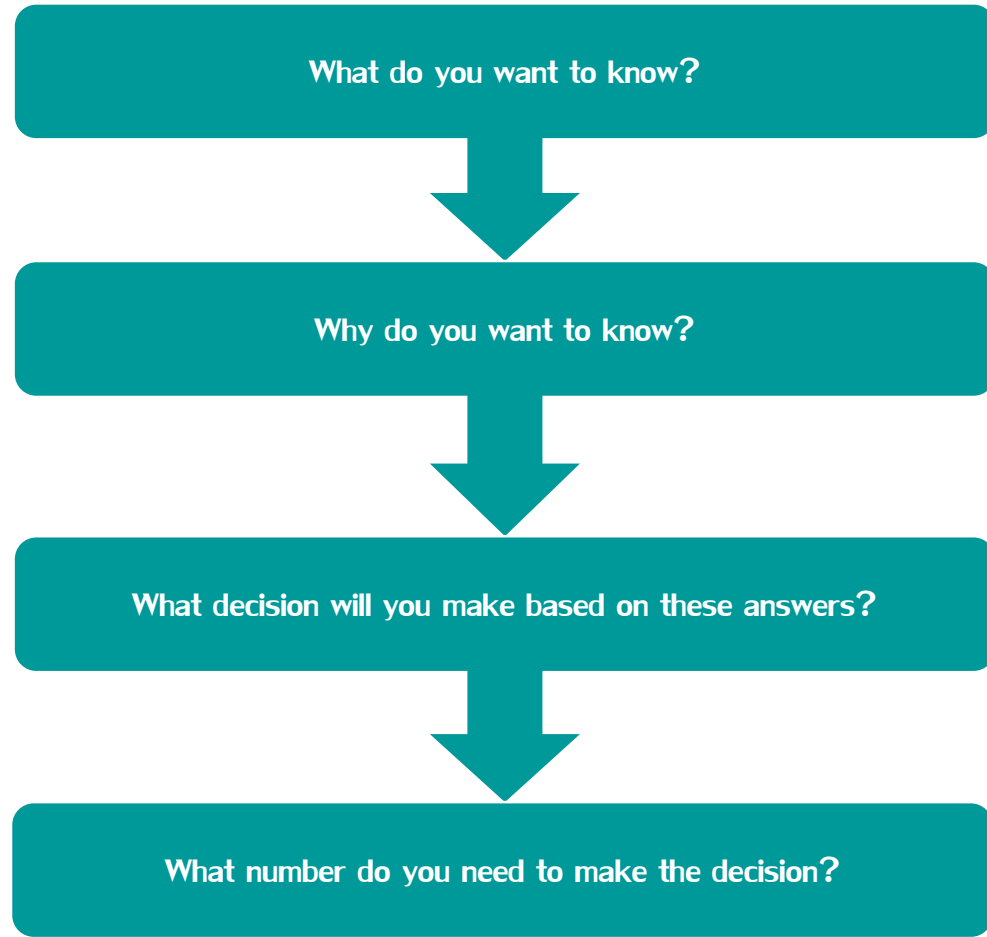
This number is the “survey statistic”.

It’s the overall result of the survey such as “93% agreed”.

It’s not the number of responses.



# I try to focus the team on a very specific decision



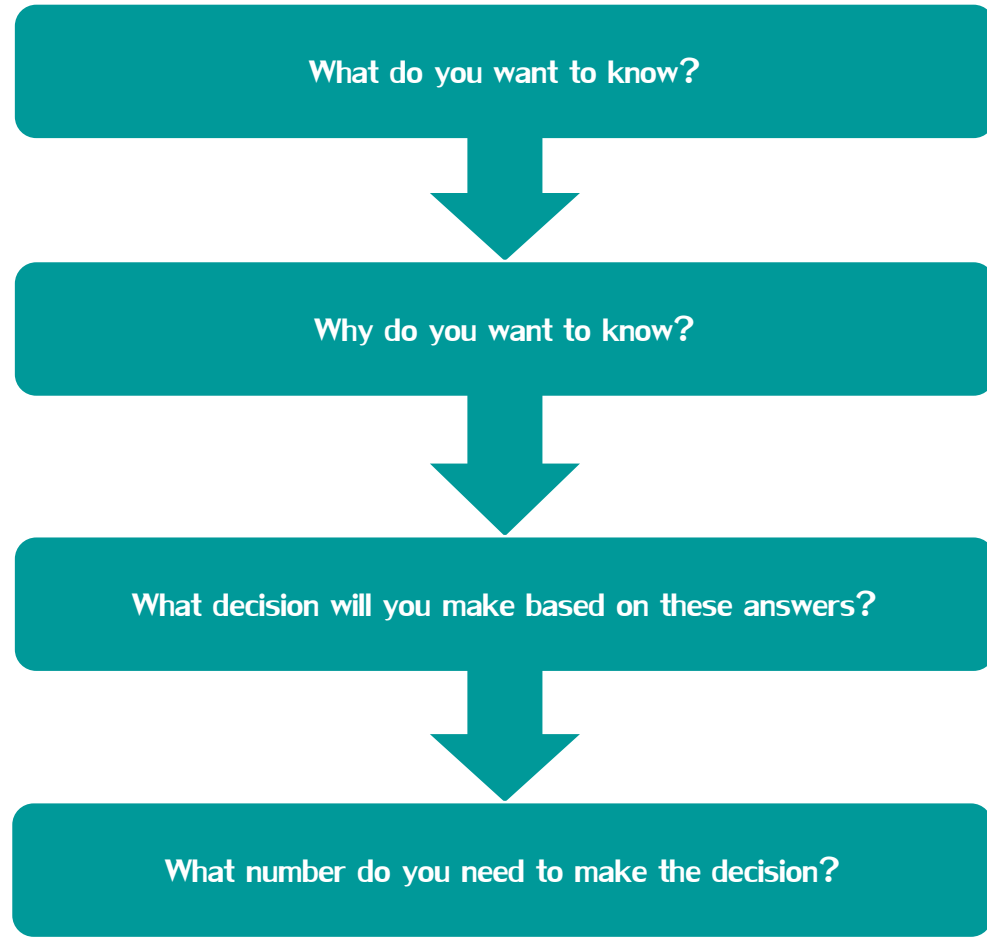
“We want to know which social media our customers use”

“We want to know how to use our social media advertising budget”

“We will choose where to place our advertisements”

“The proportion of our customers who use each type of social media”

# It's not unusual to have a sequence like this



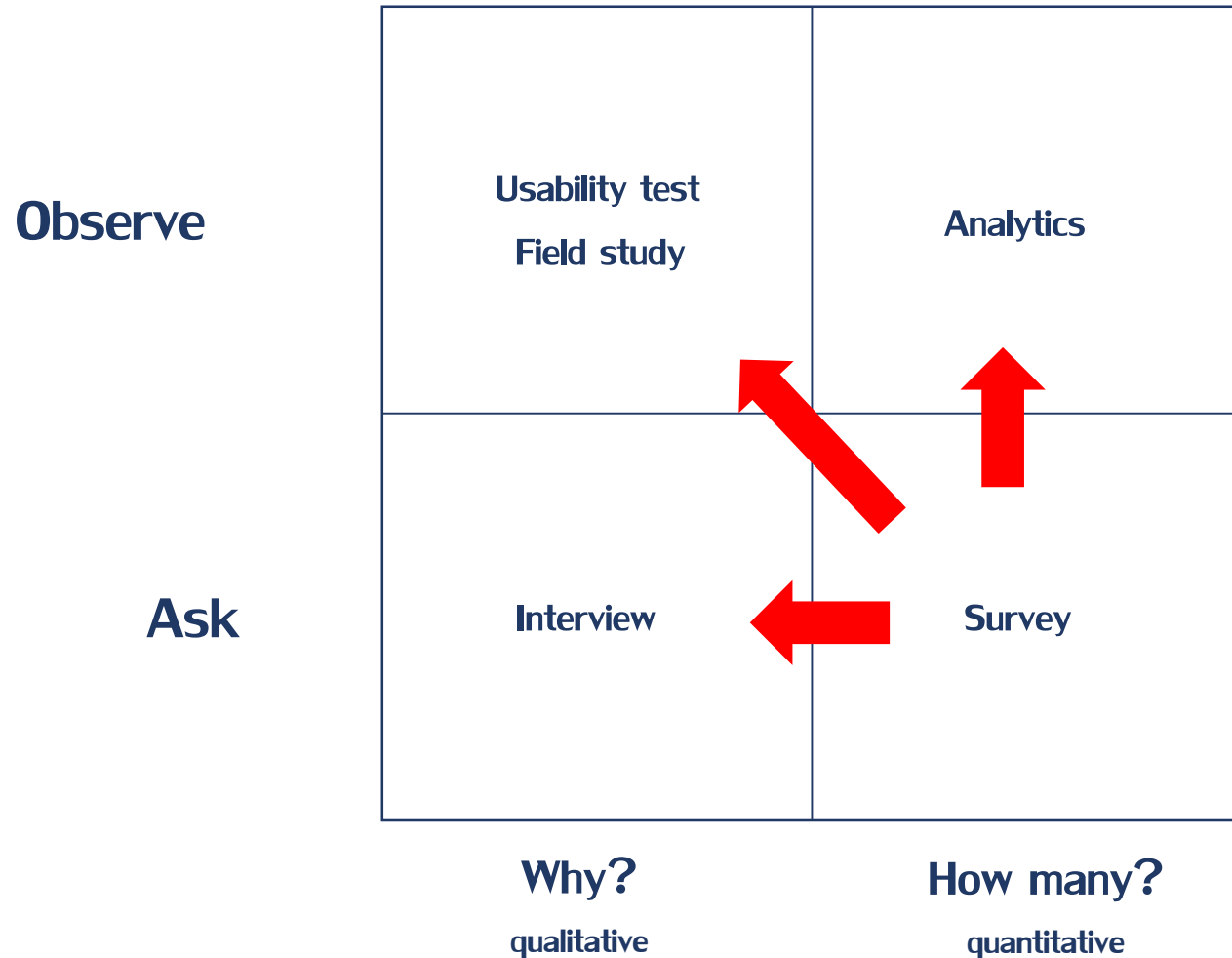
“We are worried about our job application process”

“We want to make improvements”

“We will focus on the biggest pain point”

“The point where we get the biggest dropout”

# Surveys are for counting not discovery



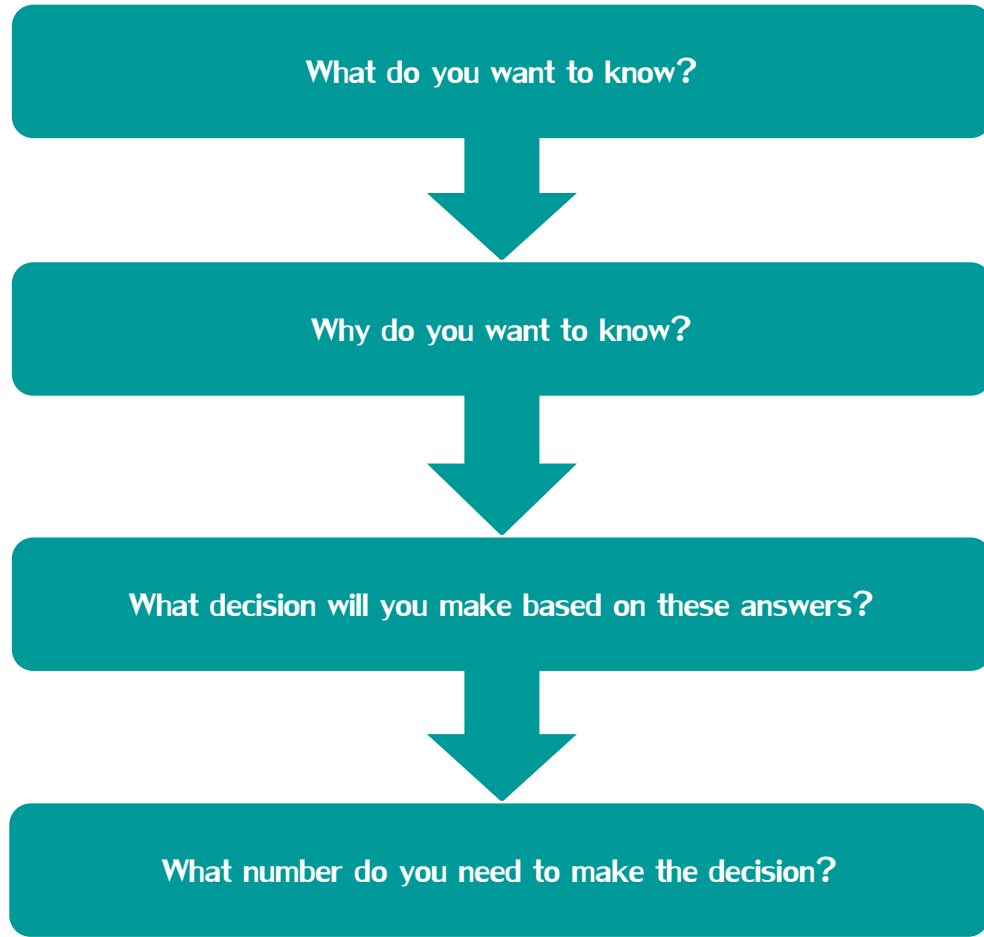
If you don't need to

- ask questions

**AND**

- get a number, try something else.

# Let's go back to our four challenges



# What's the Most Crucial Question?

*“The Most Crucial Question is the one that makes a difference. It's the one that will provide essential data for decision-making.”*

*You'll be able to state your question in these terms:*

*We need to ask \_\_\_\_\_*

*So that we can decide \_\_\_\_\_”*

# Takeaway

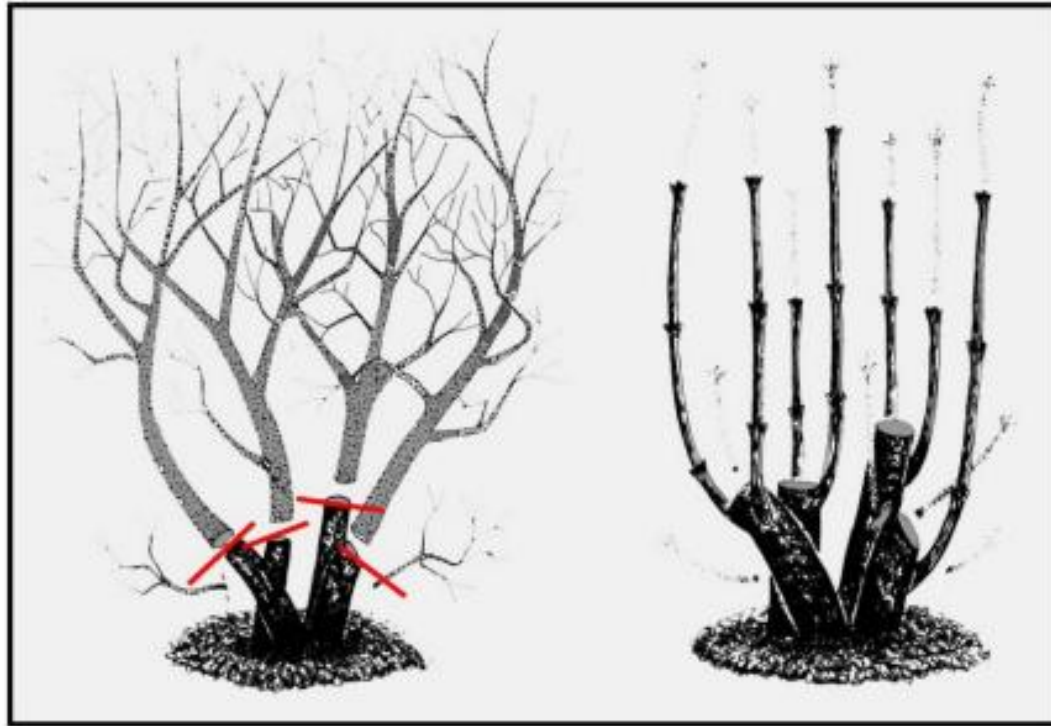
Be clear on the Most Crucial Question for every survey




# Prune: remove questions you don't need

Figure 11.

## REJUVENATION PRUNING: DRASTIC



# A Crucial Question: can we lose parking places?



5. Given that car parking studies have shown that although Duncombe Drive car park is well used, there is plenty of parking elsewhere in the town, how far do you agree or disagree with the reduction in car parking at Duncombe Drive to enable more of the area to be redeveloped?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree



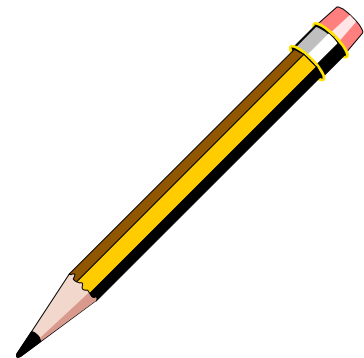
# Is this enough context for the MCQ?

“A larger redevelopment site is a more attractive opportunity to developers and regeneration can make a bigger difference to the town centre.

Car parking studies have shown that although Duncombe Drive car park is well used, there is plenty of parking elsewhere in the town”

“How far do you agree or disagree that the Council should redevelop the land it owns south of the High Street?”

“How far do you agree or disagree that a community / cultural facility is important to include in the redevelopment potential of the site?”



# Do usability testing on your questions

Get someone to fill in your questionnaire while you watch

Extra tip:

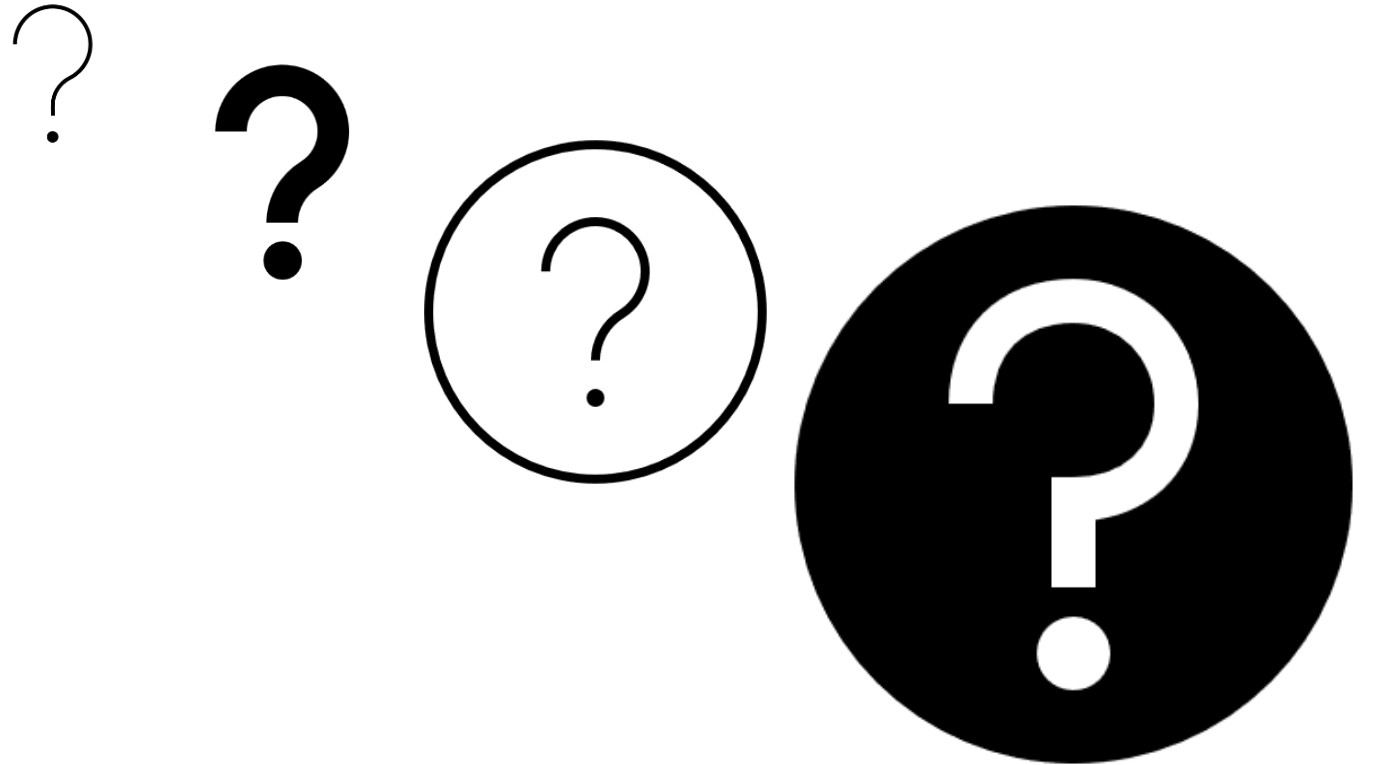
Get them to tell you what they are thinking as they work out their answers to the questions



# Takeaway

It's OK to include a few extra questions to set the context for the MCQ.

Make sure you test them.



# Agenda

- ✓ A bit about me
- ✓ Surveys and consultations
- ✓ Big Honkin' Surveys and Light Touch Surveys

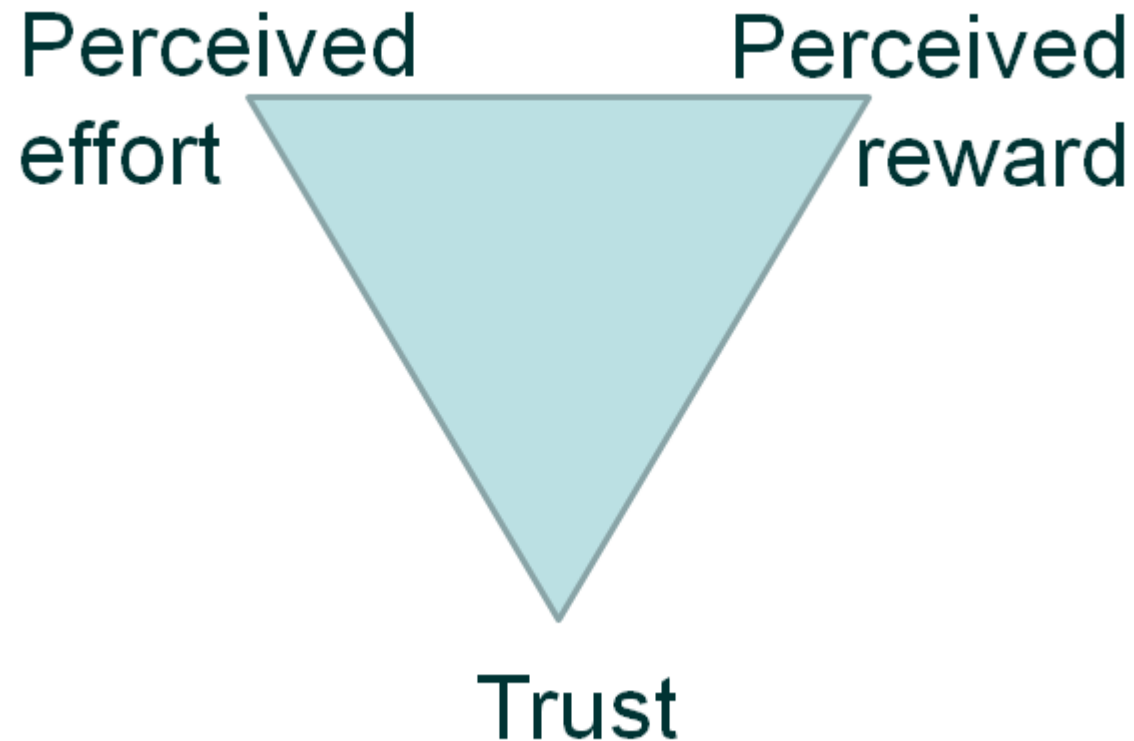
## Improve your survey's effectiveness

- ✓ 1. The Most Crucial Question
- 2. The Burning Issue

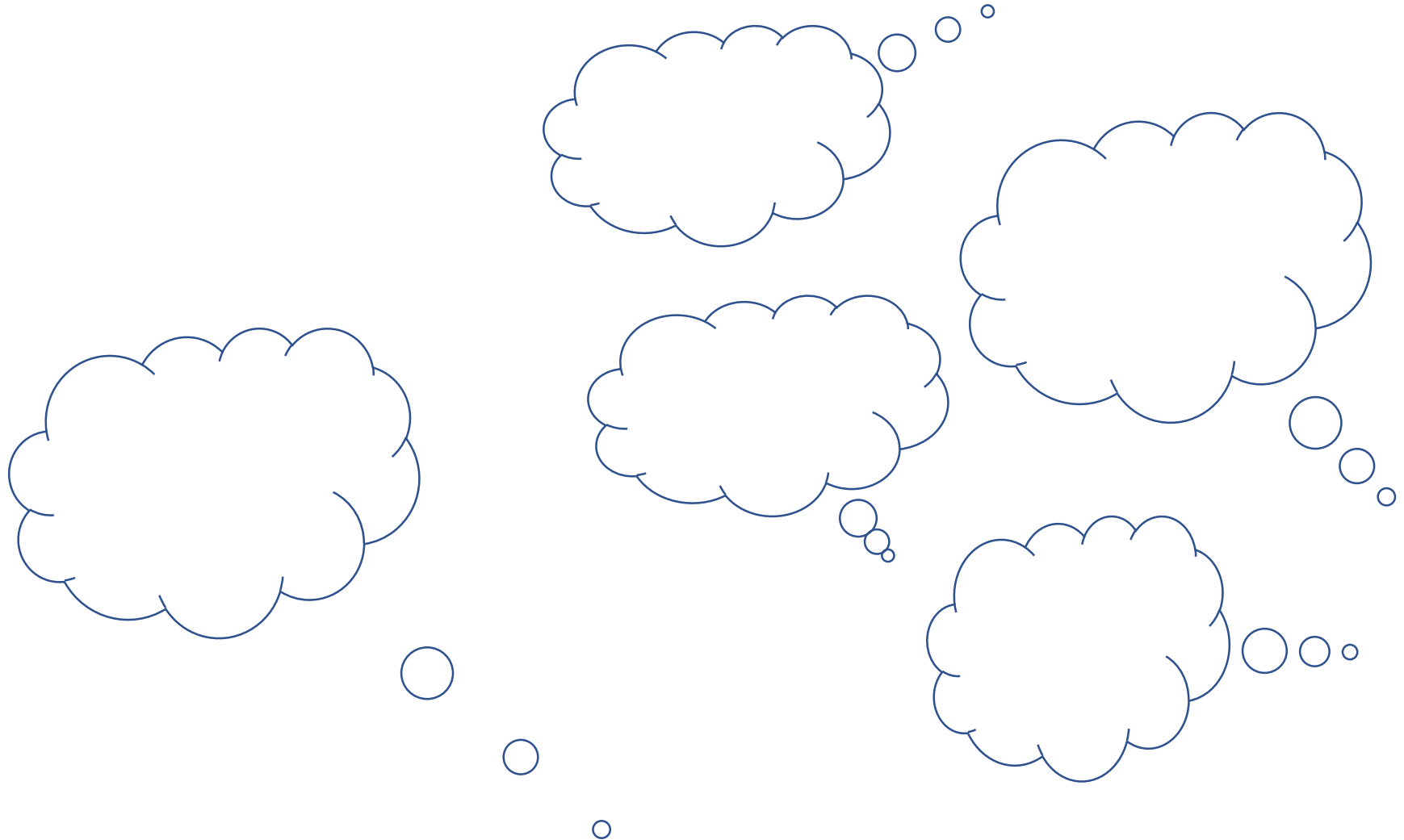
## Representativeness

## The survey process

# Response depends on effort, reward and trust



# Burning Issues are things that people want to tell you



# Interview users about the topics in your survey

- Who are they?
- How will you find them?
- Do they want to answer your questions?
- What are their Burning Issues?
- Do they understand your questions?




# Survey methodologists start with interviews






# A 'further comments' box is also a space for Burning Issues




Home Services FAQs My Accounts My Requests GovDelivery

How would you rate your experience with using this site today?

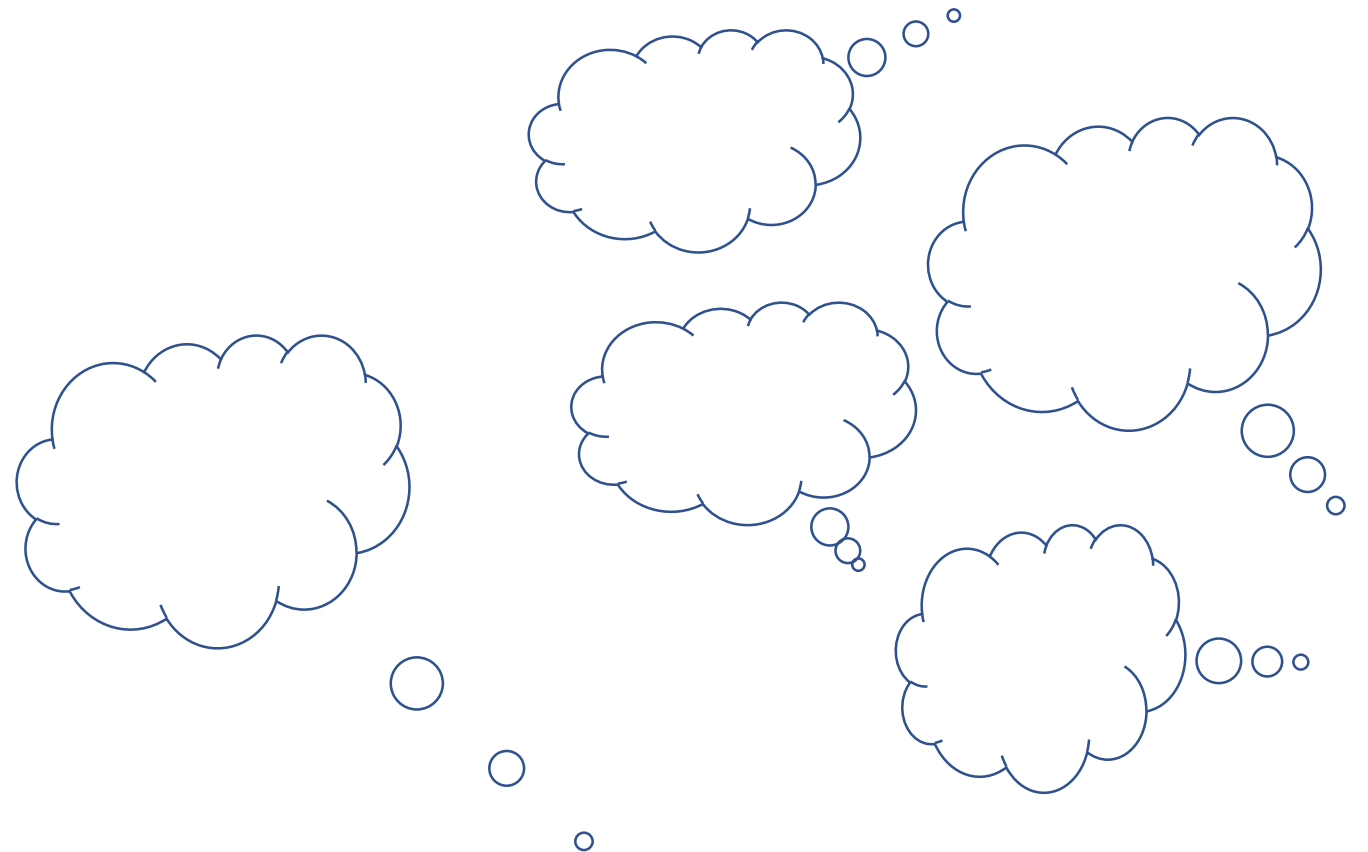


Please add further comments here.....

Skip this step Submit 

# Takeaway

It's good to make space for people to tell you what they want to tell you



# Agenda

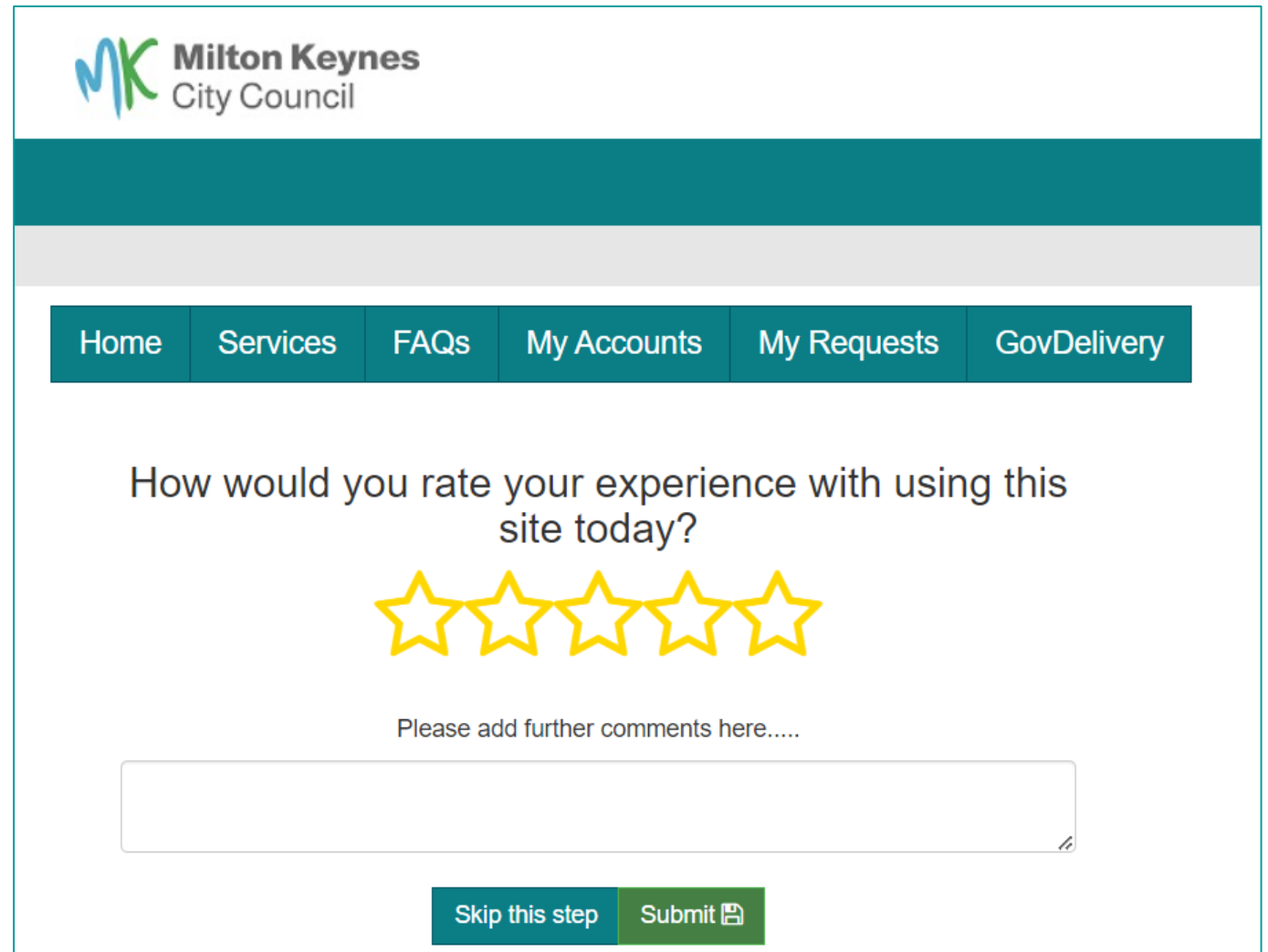
- ✓ A bit about me
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Representativeness

The survey process

# “Every single time” surveys get low response rates

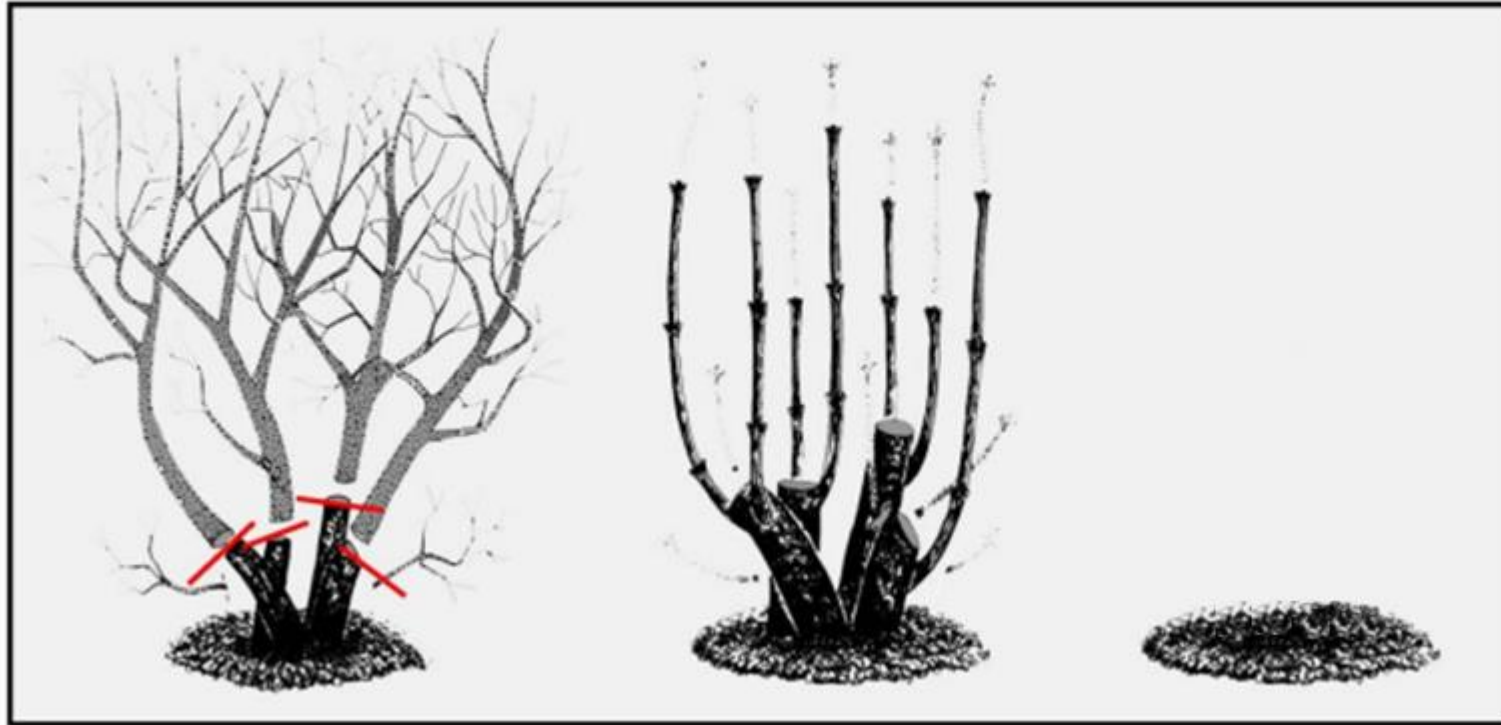
- Who will look at the response?
- What decision will get made?



The screenshot shows a survey form from Milton Keynes City Council. At the top left is the logo for Milton Keynes City Council, consisting of the letters 'MK' in blue and green, followed by the text 'Milton Keynes City Council'. Below the logo is a dark teal horizontal bar. Underneath this bar is a light grey horizontal bar. Below the grey bar is a navigation menu with six items: 'Home', 'Services', 'FAQs', 'My Accounts', 'My Requests', and 'GovDelivery', each in a dark teal box. The main content area contains the question 'How would you rate your experience with using this site today?' followed by five yellow stars. Below the stars is a text input field with the placeholder text 'Please add further comments here.....'. At the bottom of the form are two buttons: 'Skip this step' in a dark teal box and 'Submit' in a green box with a document icon.

# Keep it realistic. Extremely short fails, too.

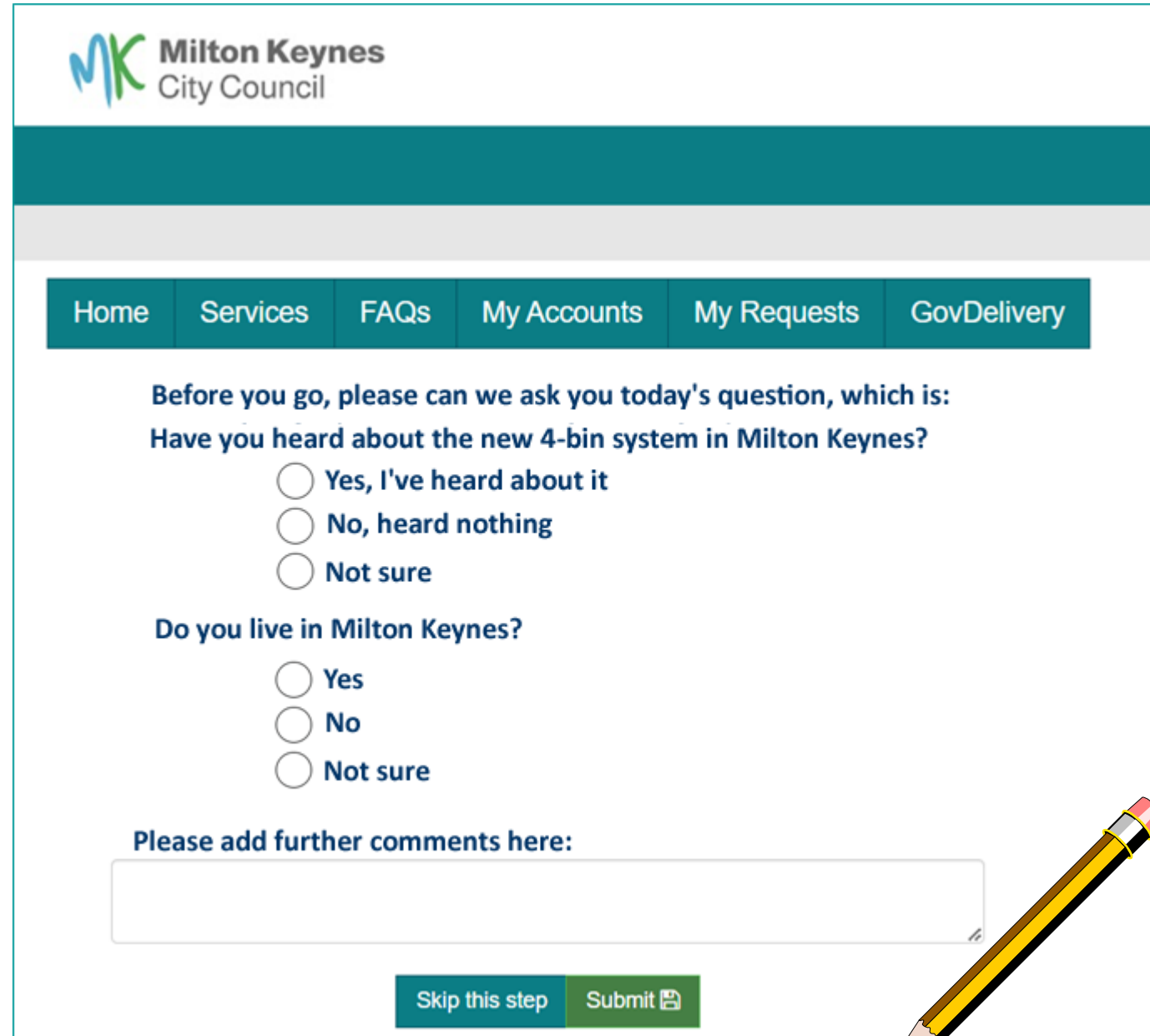
Figure 11.  
**EXTREME PRUNING: UNTRUSTWORTHY**



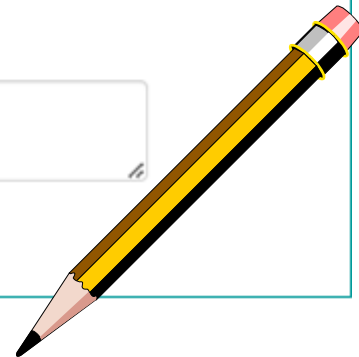
# Is this any better?

I've added:

- A “Question of the day”
- A representativeness question, to help us understand who answered



The screenshot shows the Milton Keynes City Council website. At the top left is the logo with 'MK' in blue and green, followed by 'Milton Keynes City Council'. Below the logo is a teal navigation bar with buttons for 'Home', 'Services', 'FAQs', 'My Accounts', 'My Requests', and 'GovDelivery'. The main content area contains a survey question: 'Before you go, please can we ask you today's question, which is: Have you heard about the new 4-bin system in Milton Keynes?'. There are three radio button options: 'Yes, I've heard about it', 'No, heard nothing', and 'Not sure'. Below this is another question: 'Do you live in Milton Keynes?' with three radio button options: 'Yes', 'No', and 'Not sure'. At the bottom of the survey is a text input field labeled 'Please add further comments here:'. At the very bottom are two buttons: 'Skip this step' and 'Submit' with a document icon.



# Takeaway

## Check these four things about each question

1. Does it help us to understand who answered?
2. Is there a way for people to tell us their Burning Issues?
3. Is it the Most Crucial Question?
4. It is essential to lead into the Most Crucial Question?

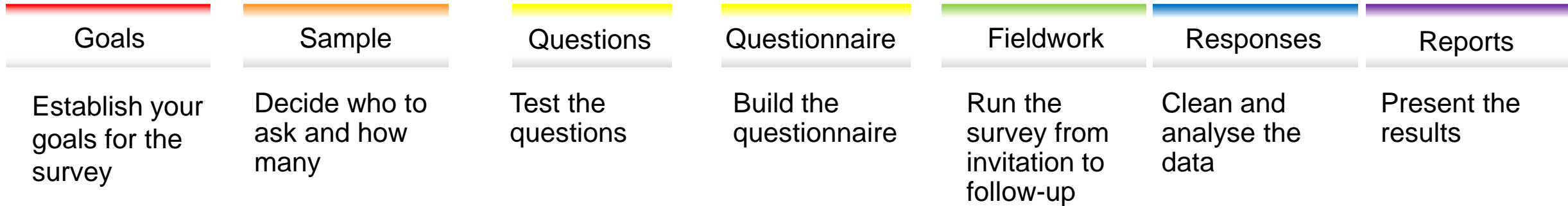
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- ✓ A bit about me
- ✓ Surveys and consultations
- ✓ Big Honkin' Surveys and Light Touch Surveys
- ✓ Improve your survey
  - ✓ 1. The Most Crucial Question
  - ✓ 2. The Burning Issue
- ✓ Representativeness

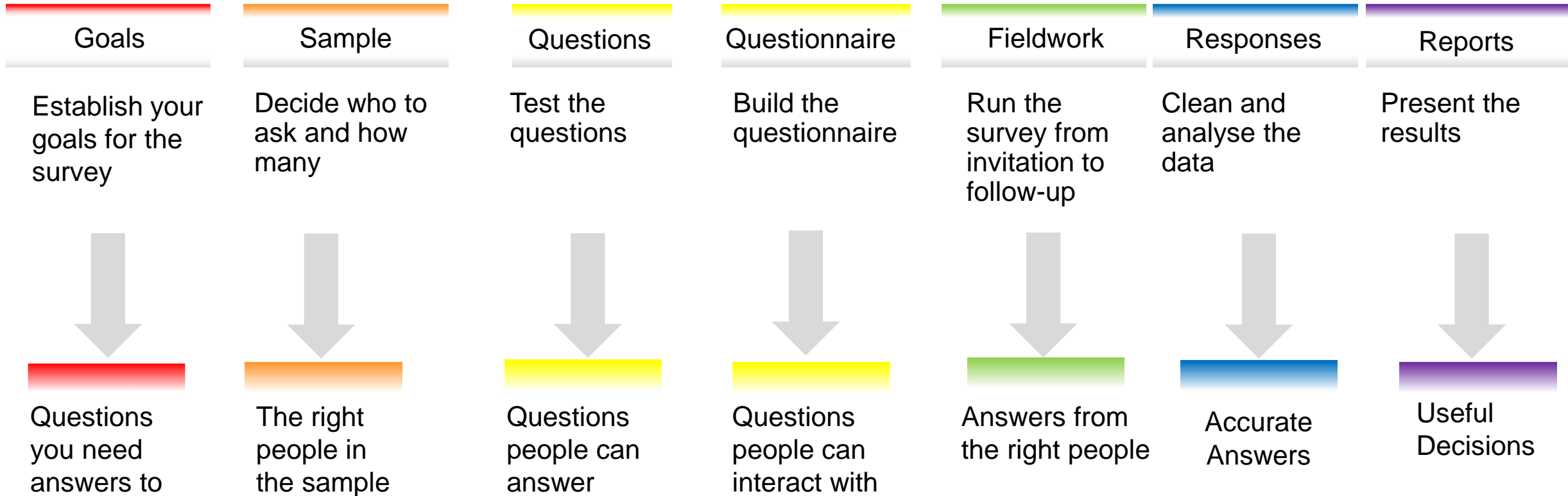
## The survey process



# Here is my process in stages



# You get a better survey by doing many things well



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