Learning on the Run 24: Graphing Survey Consensus
How to display consensus from survey data in a quick and easy way?

The Request. A Regional Director of Human Resources (HR) within a federal natural resource agency was interested in collecting feedback from her customers around the region. On the basis of that feedback, she wanted her team to make recommendations for further professional development for all of the HR Managers. This was to ensure that the Human Resource Division was aligned with best practices and customer needs. The Regional Director hoped that the feedback would be useful in determining the training and development priorities for HR personnel for the next planning cycle.

Larger Context. The Regional HR Division had an HR Manager in each of 14 different local area offices around a tri-state region. Each HR Manager had a solid line reporting relationship to the Regional Director and a matrix reporting relationship to the Natural Resource Manager at the local area office. A Survey Team tasked with survey design and data collection sponsored a focus group to create and organize a comprehensive list of HR functions and their definitions. These functions were evaluated by a survey of HR Managers to determine what level of expertise (from general to expert knowledge) was needed for each HR function. The survey was sent to all Local Area Office Managers and to the HR Managers, their direct reports, and their clients.

Consulting Intervention. Working with the Survey Team, we designed and facilitated an all-hands conference for HR Managers to review the survey data and make recommendations to leadership on priority areas for employee development. Conference participants were provided the survey results in the form of a graph. These graphs displayed the level of agreement or consensus among the respondents and the average expertise needed for each function (See figure below as an example graph). So, anyone viewing this graph could quickly determine which HR functions received consensus support for greater expertise, which did respondents feel strongly about and which did they reach consensus on (e.g., item 8 on the figure below).

Last line: For clients that are comfortable with data, a graphic display of survey item consensus and opinion strength helps them see at a glance which items are strongly agreed upon by respondents.

Commentary: If I had this to do again, I would suggest we collect similar information about HR role and function from external informed stakeholders as well (e.g., best practice HR-functioning agencies and companies, academics, etc.).