

Five Questions Leaders Should Ask About Their Walkthrough Data

A Practical Guide for Moving from Observation Counts to Organizational Interpretation

Most walkthrough debriefs start with the wrong question. They start with 'what did we see?' That question pulls the conversation toward individual classrooms and individual teachers. These five questions pull it toward organizational patterns.

Question 1: What patterns are repeating across classrooms that have nothing else in common?

When the same instructional weakness shows up in classrooms taught by teachers with different experience levels, different content areas, and different coaching support, it is not a coincidence. It is an organizational condition. Look for the pattern that transcends individual context. That is the pattern your organization is producing.

Question 2: Where are we seeing the same gap in teachers with very different experience levels?

If a first year teacher and a fifteen year veteran are both struggling with the same instructional practice, the explanation is not individual skill. The explanation is that your organization has not built the infrastructure to make that practice a norm. New teachers and experienced teachers respond to the same organizational conditions.

Question 3: What does the data suggest about whether our professional development is reaching instruction?

If you invested in PD on questioning techniques last quarter, your walkthrough data should show movement in questioning. If it does not, the question is not whether the PD was good. The question is whether the organizational conditions exist for PD to transfer into daily practice. Is anyone following up? Is the coaching aligned? Are walkthroughs looking for it?

Question 4: What are we not seeing that we expected to see?

Sometimes the most important finding in walkthrough data is the absence of something. If your school has invested heavily in collaborative learning structures and your walkthroughs show almost no evidence of student to student academic discourse, that gap is a leadership signal. It means the organizational pathway from priority to practice has a break in it.

Question 5: If a new teacher joined tomorrow, what would our data tell them about what this organization values instructionally?

This question forces you to read your walkthrough data as a cultural document. A new teacher arriving in your building would learn very quickly what matters here by observing what gets noticed, what gets reinforced, and what gets ignored. Your data reveals that same picture. Are you reading it?

Bring this to your next walkthrough debrief. Print it out. Put it on the table. And see what happens when you shift the conversation from individual observations to organizational patterns.