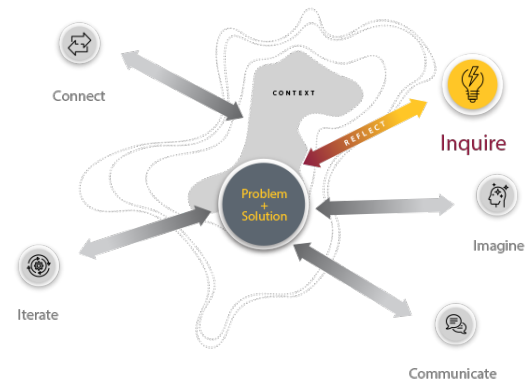


Inquiry through Empathy Interviews



What is it?

Empathy interviews are conversations with those who are affected by a problem you are trying to address. These interviews are conducted with a number of different people using the same set of questions, called an “interview guide.” Creating an interview guide helps you gather consistent feedback about the problem from different perspectives. The interviews should begin to uncover recurring themes and insights related to the problem.

Why use it?

Empathy interviews can help you better understand the perspectives of the people affected by a problem or challenge. There are often many variables influencing a problem, and any solution can have consequences that affect a variety of people.

Taking this step can help you uncover any underlying issues or root causes and learn from different perspectives, rather than making assumptions about what others are thinking or feeling. It can give you a clearer understanding of how existing systems or relationships affect the problem. ***You want to see the full picture so that you solve the right problem, the right way.***

Examples: School leaders might want to understand the motivation behind teacher actions or instructional choices *before* developing a solution, or a team of teachers may want to hear directly from a diverse group of parents in order to find better ways to communicate with families.

What you need



30 – 60 minutes

- Pen and paper or digital word document
- Audio recorder (optional)
- Interview guide (see below)
- Yourself and one other person to take notes, if possible

How to conduct an empathy interview

1. **Identify** the different people who are affected by the problem.
2. **Schedule** time to meet with each of them individually. Allow for a minimum of 30 minutes.
3. **Important: Be clear** about the purpose of the interview. It is to gather information about the problem, **not** to assign blame or punishment about the problem. Tell each person you're interviewing that there are no wrong answers -- you are just looking for different perspectives.
4. **Ask questions about how each person experiences the problem.** Ask the person why they might take certain actions during this scenario to understand the choices they make. A conversation started from one question should go on as long as it needs to. When thinking of questions to include, **ask yourself:**
 - a. What will this question tell me about the problem?
 - b. How will I act on the answers I get from this question?
5. **Make sure you're prepared to capture.** Interview in pairs. If this is not possible, you should use a voice recorder, as it is impossible to properly engage in conversation and take detailed notes at the same time. The things that make you say to yourself "Aha!" are what you are looking for.
6. **Review the notes and recordings from these interviews** to help you as you explore design ideas that address the perspectives that others have shared with you.

Tips



Don't say "usually" when asking a question. Instead, ask about a specific instance or occurrence, such as "tell me about the last time you ...".



Don't ask yes/no questions. Yes/no questions can be answered in a word; you want to create a conversation built upon stories.



Look for inconsistencies. Sometimes what people say and what they do are different. These inconsistencies often hide interesting insights.



Encourage stories. Whether or not the stories people tell are completely true, they reveal how they think about the world. Ask questions that get people telling stories.



Avoid using leading questions. To capture the true feelings or behaviors of the interviewee, avoid language that makes assumptions, uses coercion, links to other statements, or makes implications.



Don't be afraid of silence. Interviewers often feel the need to ask another question when there is a pause. If you allow for silence, a person can reflect on what they've just said and may reveal something deeper.